

Information Guide



European Economic and Social Committee

A guide to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), with hyperlinks to sources of information within European Sources Online and on external websites

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Introduction

The Lisbon Treaty has given the EESC new opportunities and broadened competences. For the first time the institutions are obliged to give civil society and representative associations the possibility to express their views and engage in open, transparent and regular dialogue. Dialogue also means listening, not just voicing one's own views. Even if there have always been opportunities for dialogue and open expression in the EESC's everyday work, the treaty also encourages it to develop its role and relations with the other institutions.

From: [President's work programme and priorities for 2010-2013](#)

Too well-behaved, too conformist, too private ... the EESC must change its working methods. It should no longer be satisfied with responding in the same way as the many other advisory forums in Brussels. The EESC needs to show more initiative by capitalising on its principal resource: its members. In the EU institutions, they alone convey a message that is strong and, at times, disturbing; they alone are capable of playing the role of "critic" and jostling the EU into action.

From: [Priorities](#) of EESC President, Henri Malosse.

Overview

The [European Economic and Social Committee](#) (EESC) is a consultative assembly of 353 members from the 28 Member States of the European Union, consisting of representatives of the various economic and social components of organised [civil society](#). As well as representatives of employers' and employees' organisations there are members who speak for a variety of interests such as farmers, co-operatives, small businesses, the professions, consumers, family associations, people with disabilities and science and education.

The EESC is one of the Union's key consultative bodies whose primary role is to contribute to the European Union's decision-making process by formulating and issuing independent, expert opinions on proposed legislation and issues of interest.

Originally called the Economic and Social Committee (ESC), in July 2002 the Committee amended its [Rules of Procedure](#) (July 2010 version), formally changing its name to European Economic and Social Committee.

History

The Economic and Social Committee was set up in 1957 by the [Treaty establishing the European Community](#) (TEC). Its structure and activities were governed by Articles 257-262 of the Treaty. The EESC was originally concerned with: the internal market (notably free movement of workers, capital, goods and services); social policy and employment (education and training, economic and social cohesion, structural funds, equality of the sexes); environment and public health; research; and sectoral policies (agriculture, industry, services, transport).

The EESC's role was consolidated by the 1987 Single European Act ([text](#) courtesy of Archive of European Integration), which amended or extended its interests in the following areas: transport by rail, road and inland waterway; taxation; harmonisation in the Single Market; health and safety at work; economic and social cohesion; research and development; environment.

The 1993 [Treaty on European Union](#) (TEU) introduced further additions and refinements to the EESC's remit in the areas of: citizenship of the Union; public health; consumer protection; trans-European networks; industry; economic and social cohesion; Cohesion Funds; regional funds; research and development - Framework Programme; education; vocational training; consultation under the protocol on social policy.

The TEU also amended the EESC's organisation and Rules of Procedure, and established a joint Secretariat for the EESC and the [Committee of the Regions](#) (CoR) - an arrangement which lasted until the Treaty of Amsterdam (effective from 1 May 1999) separated the shared administrative structure. The [Treaty of Amsterdam](#) also amended the scope of the EESC's activities in employment, social affairs, equal opportunities and public health. The Treaty of Amsterdam also allowed the European Parliament to consult the EESC when Parliament considered it appropriate.

The representative nature of the EESC was confirmed under the [Treaty of Nice](#) of February 2001, with the new Article 257 stating that the Committee is to consist of 'representatives of the various economic and social components of organised civil society', thus clarifying the Committee's role as a relay between Europe and civil society organisations, with it acting as a permanent, structured forum for dialogue and consultation at Community level.

Legal basis

There is only one mention of the EESC in the current Treaty on European Union ([TEU](#)), with Article 13(4) stating:

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission shall be assisted by an Economic and Social Committee and a Committee of the Regions acting in an advisory capacity.

Following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, detailed provisions on the Union's advisory bodies are set out in Articles 300-307 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union ([TFEU](#)).

Echoing the words of the TEU, Article 300(1) states:

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission shall be assisted by an Economic and Social Committee and a Committee of the Regions, exercising advisory functions.

Under Article 300(2), the EESC:

shall consist of representatives of organisations of employers, of the employed, and of other parties representative of civil society, notably in socio-economic, civic, professional and cultural areas.

Article 300(4) provides that Members of the Committee:

shall not be bound by any mandatory instructions. They shall be completely independent in the performance of their duties, in the Union's general interest.

Articles 301-304 deal specifically with the EESC. Under Article 301, the Economic and Social Committee is limited to a maximum of 350 members. Each serves a renewable five year term and are appointed on the basis of proposals made by Member States (Article 302).

When the national mandate on which their appointment to the CoR depends comes to an end, the term of office of members of the Committee automatically ends.

The Committee's President and officers are elected from among its members for a term of two and a half years (Article 303).

Under Article 304, the EESC:

shall be consulted by the European Parliament, by the Council or by the Commission where the Treaties so provide. The Committee may be consulted by these institutions in all cases in which they consider it appropriate. It may issue an opinion on its own initiative in cases in which it considers such action appropriate.

The same Article also provides for the Committee to be required to submit an Opinion within a specified time.

Amongst the [Protocols](#) attached to the Treaty of Lisbon, one on transitional provisions sets out the allocation of members of the EESC (see Article 7). The 344 places are allocated as shown below in 'Structure and composition'.

The [President's work programme and priorities for 2010-2013](#) also highlights other Treaty provisions particularly relevant to the EESC, including those on democratic principles set out in Article 11 of the [TEU](#):

1. The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action.
2. The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.
3. The European Commission shall carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent.
4. Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.

Role

Four roles can be identified for the EESC:

1. A consultative role, under which its advice must be sought on proposed legislation, in specific areas identified by the Treaties. Examples include the following, specified in the [TFEU](#) (and previously in the [TEC](#)):

- agricultural policy (Article 43, ex Article 37)
- consumer protection (Article 169, ex Article 153)
- harmonisation of indirect taxation (Article 113, ex Article 93)
- industrial policy (Article 173, ex Article 157)
- internal market - approximation of laws (Articles 114-115, ex Articles 94 and 95)
- public health (Article 168, ex Article 152)
- trans-European networks (Article 172, ex Article 156)

The consultative process results in Opinions, which provide information on the potential impact of Commission proposals and on what amendments may be necessary. Opinions are published in the [Official Journal of the European Union](#) C series and on the EESC's website (see [Opinions in the spotlight](#)). The EESC can also produce 'information reports' (Rule 31 of the [Rules of Procedure](#)), which are not published in the Official Journal, but are sent to the other EU institutions.

2. An enabling role, in which the Committee helps organisations representing civil society become more closely involved in 'Europe' (see [The EESC: a bridge between Europe and organised civil society](#); in 2004, the EESC set up a [Liaison Group](#) to promote 'stronger and more structured cooperation with European civil society organisations and networks').

3. An 'institution building' role in non-EU countries, under which the Committee seeks to strengthen existing civil society organisations and to establish others. The EESC maintains relations with economic and social interest groups in Central and Eastern Europe, the European Economic Area, Turkey and the Euromed, Latin America, ACP and Mercosur countries (see pages on [External Relations - EU's neighbours](#), [External Relations - Other continents](#), [External Relations Section](#)).

4. An information and integration role, in which the EESC hosts events aimed at bringing the EU closer to citizens and - via the [Single Market Observatory](#) - examines how the Single Market is really working.

Relations with the European Commission are governed by a [Protocol of cooperation](#), the latest version of which was signed on 7 November 2005. This revised protocol 'paves the way for stronger and more political cooperation and aims to enable the Commission and the Committee to identify, in a more systematic and organised fashion, the policies and files in which they share an interest.' Changes included improved cooperation between the Committee's sections and the Commission's Directorates-General, and greater cooperation in a number of key policy areas: the Lisbon Strategy, sustainable development, structural changes, impact analysis and implementation of Community legislation, external relations. An Addendum was issued on 31 May 2007, setting out the operational arrangements for cooperation between the two institutions on communication policy (see also news item in [EESC Info](#)). On 22 February 2012, a new agreement was signed, replacing the previous texts (see EESC [Protocol](#) page).

The Committee produces a range of publications, many of which give an insight into its work, including: [EESC presentation 2013](#); [The impact of the European Economic and Social Committee](#); [Shaping Europe: Recent EESC Achievements](#), [Transport, energy, infrastructures, information society](#), and [Section for employment, social affairs and citizenship](#).

In addition, the EESC publishes a booklet marking each six-month EU Presidency, with information about the Presidency country and details of the Committee's priorities and activities during the period concerned (see for example [EESC priorities during the Lithuanian presidency](#); other booklets can be found via the page on publications [On the EESC](#)).

Enlargement and external relations

In order to foster links between members of the EESC and representatives of the main economic and social organisations in applicant states, a number of Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs) have been set up under the aegis of the Committee's External Relations Section ([REX](#)). The first JCC was set up with [Turkey](#) in 1995 and there are also JCCs for [Croatia](#) and the [Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#).

Two meetings take place each year, one in Brussels and one in the respective candidate country. In addition, there is a [Western Balkans](#) Contact Group and an [Eastern Neighbours](#) Contact Group (covering relations with Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan).

Relevant EESC publications include: [The EESC and the Western Balkans](#), [The EESC and Turkey](#); and [The EESC and the EU's Eastern Neighbours](#); see also pages on [External Relations - EU's neighbours](#), [External Relations - Other continents](#), and REX - the [External Relations Section](#)).

In 2000, the EESC and the national Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) agreed to create a central information point to provide the general public with information about the institutions and their work. A working group called CESlink was set up and a website was created to provide: an online directory of Economic and Social Councils and similar bodies; basic information on how to contact them; and a central e-mail address from which to request general information. The [CESlink website](#) lists 21 EU Member States as ESC members, plus the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions, and the EESC itself (see also [CESlink leaflet](#)).

Structure and composition

The EESC is a non-political body, whose 344 members are drawn from economic and social interest groups.

A [Members Statute](#) (rules of procedure), first adopted in July 2002 and last revised in January 2012, sets out rules governing the Committee. The Statute is based on the following considerations:

- The Committee has its own identity, as the representative of organised civil society and a consultative body for the European political institutions
- Members should be able to carry out their functions independently with full autonomy
- They have obligations of transparency and visibility with regard to European citizens

EESC members are not paid, although they do receive daily allowances for attending meetings in Brussels. [Members](#) are nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council for a renewable five-year term (prior to the Treaty of Lisbon entering into force, the term was four years). The current term runs from October 2010 to September 2015. The EESC President is elected for a period of two and a half years.

Under Article 2 (1) of the [Members Statute](#):

The position of member of the European Economic and Social Committee shall be incompatible with that of member of a government, a parliament, a European Union institution, the Committee of the Regions or the board of directors of the European Investment Bank, and with the post of official or other servant of the European Union in active employment.

The current distribution of members by country is as follows:

Member State	Number of EESC members
France, Germany, Italy, UK	24
Poland, Spain	21
Romania	15
Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden	12
Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia	9
Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia	7
Cyprus, Luxembourg	6
Malta	5
Total	353

Members of the Committee for the period 21 September 2010 to 20 September 2015 were appointed by [Council Decision 2010/570/EU, Euratom](#). Details of members and staff of the EESC can be found via the [EU Whoiswho](#) directory and the EESC [Members](#) page.

Groups

Members are divided between three Groups:

- [Employers' Group](#) (Group I). This Group has 117 members from private and public sectors of industry, small businesses, chambers of commerce, wholesale and retail trade, banking and insurance, transport and agriculture. The Group maintains relations with employers' associations and sectoral organisations in the EU.
- [Workers' Group](#) (Group II). The 121 members of the Workers' Group have a background in national trade unionism organisations, both confederations and sectoral federations.
- [Various Interests Group](#) (Group III). Members of this Group - 111 of them - are drawn from farmers' organisations, small businesses, the crafts sector, the professions, cooperatives and non-profit associations, consumer organisations, environmental organisations, associations representing the family, people with disabilities, the scientific and academic community and non-governmental organisations.

Sections

The Committee comprises six Sections:

- [Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment](#) (NAT)
- [Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion](#) (ECO)
- [Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship](#) (SOC)
- [External Relations](#) (REX)
- [Single Market, Production and Consumption](#) (INT)
- [Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and Information Society](#) (TEN)

All members sit on at least one Section, but no more than two. Opinions of the Sections are drafted either by study or drafting groups or a rapporteur working alone. They may be assisted by appointed experts.

33 EESC members participate in the [Single Market Observatory](#), a unit set up in 1994 within the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption.

Following the expiry of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Treaty in July 2002, the EESC incorporated a new [Consultative Commission on Industrial Change](#) (CCMI) into its structure. Initially devoted to coal and steel, the CCMI expanded to include other industrial sectors affected by the industrial changes facing Europe - textiles, services, shipbuilding and the automotive industry. The CCMI has 96 members, including 48 from the EESC. The other 48 members are external delegates representing a broad spectrum of industrial sectors and interests. The first meeting of the CCMI was held in January 2005.

The EESC has also set up a [Europe 2020 Steering Committee](#) to enable national economic and social councils to be involved in the evaluation of reforms to be carried out in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The Committee's publications include introductions to the work of some of the Sections, including: [Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption](#), [Transport, energy, infrastructures, information society](#), and [Section for employment, social affairs and citizenship](#).

The EESC's work is organised and co-ordinated by a [Bureau](#), comprising 37 members elected every two and a half years. A President and two Vice-Presidents of the Bureau are chosen from each of the three Groups in rotation. The President represents the Committee in relations with outside bodies, and he or she is responsible for ensuring that business is conducted properly.

The current President is Henri Malosse, elected on 11 July 2012 (see EESC [news item](#)). In his [Inaugural speech](#), given on 18 April 2013, Mr Malosse said he:

would like to generate a "wind of change" by improving the quality of our work and making it a top priority to follow up our opinions. I want us to make judicious use of a very powerful tool we have, i.e. own-initiative opinions, to ensure that the concrete actions citizens expect are tabled before the Council and the European Parliament.

The EESC is supported by a Secretariat-General, headed by a [Secretary General](#) (see also [Annual Report for 2012 on the Human Resources of the Secretariat and Staffing Policy](#)).

Location

The EESC Secretariat is based in Brussels. Committee members are based in their home countries, but attend EESC meetings in Brussels.

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Further information, including maps, can be found on the EESC's [Contact](#) page.

Information sources in the ESO database

Find updated and further information sources in the ESO database:

[2.9 Economic and Social Committee / ECSC Consultative Committee](#)

- [Key source](#)
- [Legislation](#)
- [Policy-making](#)
- [Report](#)
- [Statistics](#)
- [News source](#)
- [Periodical article](#)
- [Textbook, monograph or reference](#)
- [Background](#)

Relevant material may also be found under:

[2.2 Current institutional developments](#)

[2.3 The policy-making process](#)

[3.5 Pressure groups/Lobbying](#)

Further information sources on the internet

- European Economic and Social Committee
 - [Homepage](#)
 - [About the Committee](#)
 - [Sections](#)
 - [Groups](#)
 - [President](#)
 - [Bureau members](#)
 - [Secretary-General](#)
 - [Rules](#)
 - [List of members](#)
 - [Register of documents](#)
 - [Work in progress](#) (TOAD database)
 - [Summary of plenary sessions](#)
 - [Opinions in the spotlight](#)
 - [Follow-up on opinions](#) (actions taken by the Commission on EESC Opinions)
 - [Press Releases](#)
 - [EESC Info](#) (newsletter)
 - [Publications](#)
- Europa
 - [European Economic and Social Committee](#)
 - Policy areas: [Institutional affairs](#)
 - Summaries of EU legislation
 - [Rules of Procedure of the European Economic and Social Committee](#)
- European Commission: DG Communication
 - [RAPID](#) press releases database - [European Economic and Social Committee's Documents](#) (pre-set search)
 - EU news: [Institutional affairs](#)

- European Union: EUR-Lex
The text of proposed and adopted legislation relating to the European Economic and Social Committee can be found via EUR-Lex:
 - [Proposed](#) - 01 General, financial and institutional matters - [01.40.70 Economic and Social Committee](#)
 - [Adopted](#) (01 General, financial and institutional matters - 01.40.70 Economic and Social Committee)
 - [Treaty on European Union](#) Article 13(4)
 - [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) Articles 300-304
- Court of Justice of the European Union: InfoCuria
[Homepage](#): at 'Name of the parties' box enter 'european economic and social committee'. Select dates if required. Hit 'Search' at top or bottom of page.
- European Parliament: Legislative Observatory (OEIL)
[Homepage](#): Carry out a [Search](#): from the right-hand menu choose 'Other institutions and bodies' and select 'Economic and Social Committee'.
- European Commission: PreLex
[Homepage](#). In [advanced search](#) either choose 'Fields of activity' and select 'Institutions', or choose 'Activities of the institutions' - 'European Economic and Social Committee Opinions'
- European Parliament: Fact Sheets
 - Fact Sheet on [The European Economic and Social Committee](#)
- International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS)
 - [Homepage](#)

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