



Background note: the role of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

1. The EESC is an EU consultative body first established by the Treaty of Rome (EC) in March 1957 to advise the decision-making institutions (now the Commission, European Parliament and Council) of the EU on an ever widening range of issues on behalf of 'organised civil society' in the member states. Its offices are in Rue Belliard, Brussels. Meetings generally take place there but may, where appropriate, be arranged anywhere in or outside the EU.
2. Input, in the form of structured and agreed 'opinions' on the majority of proposals from the Commission, is required in a timely fashion to allow the legislative programme of the EU to continue. The EESC also has the right to produce 'own-initiative opinions' or, at the request of the European Parliament or member states, 'exploratory opinions', in advance of firm proposals from the Commission. In this way the EESC facilitates the concept of 'participatory democracy' within the EU and may be said to act as a 'bridge' between the EU and its many citizens.
3. The EESC currently has 353 members (v. the Lisbon Treaty maximum of 350) from the 28 member states that now constitute the EU. National membership is broadly proportional to population. The UK, along with Germany, France and Italy, have 24 each. These members are allocated equally, wherever possible, between 3 'Groups' representing employers (Group I), employees (Group II), and special interest groups (Group III) including other socio-economic interests, professional, academic or cultural bodies, farmers and representatives of minority, disadvantaged or excluded groups and those concerned with health, environmental and demographic issues.
4. Terms of office ('mandates') are for 5 years. The current mandate ends on September 17th 2015; the next mandate will run from October 20th 2015 to mid-September 2020.
5. Members must be British or have another EU nationality and may reside and work anywhere in the UK or in Brussels. Members do not represent geographical constituencies and are required by Treaty to be 'completely independent in the performance of their duties'. Together they should be representative of civil society in the UK in all its current

diversity. The national delegation should, by working together, have the skills and time required to advise on virtually all aspects of developing EU legislation. To do this effectively, members join one of the three Groups mentioned above.

6. Members may also join no more than two of the six specialised 'Sections' (as below) and one or more of a range of subject-related 'Categories', and may also join or be nominated to or, following their election to senior roles, become ex officio members of, other Observatories, Round Tables, Follow-up and Standing Committees, Consultative Commissions, for instance on Industrial Change, and other executive and functional groups including the various Bureaux charged with managing the daily business of the Sections, Groups and the EESC as a whole. Members are assisted in their tasks by the Secretary General and secretariat of the EESC.
7. European language skills help communication between members. Incoming documentation from the Commission or Parliament or from other stakeholders is, however, now almost entirely in English. Translators and interpreters assist where necessary. The language 'regime' (which languages may be spoken or listened to) is declared at the start of each meeting. Most meetings are electronically recorded to facilitate minute-writing and to resolve any subsequent disputes over the precise wording of amendments or other interventions.
8. EESC members do not receive remuneration of any kind but do receive fixed daily allowances for work undertaken in Brussels or at other work or meeting locations to cover costs of attendance and accommodation. Travel expenses are reimbursed at cost up to defined limits. Language, IT, media and other training is available free of charge.

Policy Areas & Section Responsibilities

9. The EESC conducts hearings, undertakes impact assessments, sponsors studies and produces opinions and information reports via its specialised 'Sections' and subject-related 'work groups'. The terms of reference ('policy areas') for the 6 'Sections' are currently as follows:

ECO Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion

Macroeconomic and monetary policies and statistics
Economic and monetary union, financial markets, taxation
Regional policies, economic and social cohesion
Entrepreneurship, employment and growth
Spatial planning and urban policy

INT Single Market, Production and Consumption

Services, crafts, consumer protection and the social economy
Company law, intellectual property, research and development

Completion of the internal market, competitiveness
Health and safety standards; free movement of goods

NAT Agriculture, Rural Development & the Environment

CAP, fisheries, forestry, food production and security
Environmental protection, rural policy, climate change
Crop support regimes, effects of pesticides, critical resources

REX External Relations

External political, economic and trade relations and agreements
Partnership agreements and integration with neighbouring states
Relations with economic and social interests in non-EU countries
Relations with regional and international organisations
EU foreign and security policy and external action
Capacity building in organised civil society

SOC Employment, Social Affairs & Citizenship

Employment, labour law, social and societal rights
Free movement of persons, migration, citizenship, equality
Demographic change, minorities, health, pensions, solidarity
Education, language skills, the internet and social media
Justice and home security; controls on drugs and terrorism

TEN Transport, Energy, Infrastructure & the Information Society

Transport, infrastructure networks, distribution of services and utilities
Energy policy and dialogue, nuclear and other alternative sources
Energy security, fuel poverty and pricing, services of general interest
Information society, mass media, telecommunications, digital divide
Research and development, space policy

10. Other permanent or temporary bodies assist the above process and support the secretariat in managing the Committee as a whole:

CCMI Consultative Commission on Industrial Change

SMO Single Market Observatory

SDO Sustainable Development Observatory

LMO Labour Market Observatory

BUR Bureau

BUDG Budget Group

COMMS Communications Group

11. The Council, Commission and Parliament are required to consult the EESC on proposals for legislation relating to these policy areas as provided for in the Treaty of Lisbon and cannot generally act on a proposal until the EESC has given its opinion. These institutions and

any of the Member States, normally just before or during their 6-month 'Presidencies', may consult the EESC on these or other matters if they wish.

12. The EESC currently delivers 150- 200 opinions and other documents each year. These are forwarded to the EU's decision-making bodies and other interested parties and are published in the EU's Official Journal.

Selection Process for Members Representing the UK

13. The selection process for new members is managed by the Europe Directorates of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Information and application forms are made available on government websites. A number of civil society organisations are contacted directly. Representatives from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are proposed by their respective Parliaments and Assemblies. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) proposes members specifically for Group II.
14. Further information about the structure and ongoing work of the EESC, including a list of members from the UK and other member states, is available on its website: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu> .

5 December 2014

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