

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1255/1999 on the common organisation of the market in milk and milk products'**

(2000/C 168/05)

On 24 January 2000 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 37 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 19 April 2000. The rapporteur was Mr Kienle.

At its 372nd plenary session (meeting of 27 April 2000) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 78 votes to two, with three abstentions:

## 1. Introduction

1.1. For 16 years now the Community has been providing support to promote the consumption of milk by children and young people. Schoolchildren who take advantage of this arrangement receive a quarter of a litre of subsidised milk per day. To date this subsidy has cost the Community EUR 96 million per annum.

1.2. In the present proposal the European Commission revises its original intention of discontinuing EU support for the school milk programme. It does, however, want to reduce Community support by continuing the arrangements with 50 % Community/50 % Member State financing. The Community contribution would fall to EUR 48 million.

## 2. Comments

2.1. The Committee considers that the health, nutritional and social policy objectives of the school milk programme are of outstanding importance, even more so than the aim of boosting sales, especially as the quantity involved is only 0,3 % of total milk deliveries to dairies.

2.2. Discontinuation of the programme would undoubtedly lead to a fall in the availability and consumption of milk in schools. Children and young people would be the losers. The Committee would point out that an alarmingly large number of children go to school without any breakfast. For many, school milk is their only source of milk consumption.

2.3. The Committee welcomes the fact that the Agriculture Council has in principle expressly called for the programme's retention, hence the European Commission's reconsideration of its original intention to stop EU support.

2.4. The Committee stresses the great importance of a balanced diet for young and school-age children. Milk is one of the most valuable foodstuffs and should be made attractive to them by all modern distribution and marketing means. Furthermore, the Committee regards it as essential that children and young people throughout the Community continue to be provided with subsidised school milk.

2.5. The Committee fears, however, that in practice the Commission proposal will lead to the end of school milk in many Member States. It therefore calls for a solution which will ensure the continuation of the school milk programme. Under no circumstances must children become a political football in a fight over the principle of co-financing.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

*The President*  
*of the Economic and Social Committee*  
Beatrice RANGONI MACHIAVELLI