

English edition

## Information and Notices

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## II

(Preparatory Acts)

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directives 85/611/EEC, 92/49/EEC, 92/96/EEC and 93/22/EEC as regards exchange of information with third countries'**

(2000/C 168/01)

On 10 April 2000 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 5 April 2000. The rapporteur was Mr Burani.

At its 372nd plenary session (meeting of 27 April 2000) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 103 votes to one.

### 1. Introduction

1.1. Directive 98/33/EC of 22 June 1998<sup>(1)</sup> amends Article 12 of Directive 77/780/EEC<sup>(2)</sup> (first banking directive), Articles 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8 and Annexes II and III of Directive 89/647/EEC<sup>(3)</sup> on a solvency ratio for credit institutions, and Article 2 and Annex II of Directive 93/6/EEC<sup>(4)</sup> on the capital adequacy of investments firms and credit institutions. The amendments referred to here concern the rules on the exchange of confidential information, in the context of cooperation agreements with the bodies or authorities of third countries which help in any way to strengthen the stability of the financial sector.

1.2. The said rules are intended to widen the scope of information exchange: whereas hitherto such exchange had been allowed only between supervisory authorities (in some cases confined to the countries of the European Union), the aforementioned Directive extends this capability in the sense set out in the last paragraph of point 1.1 above. The aim is clearly to contribute to the formation of a corpus of overall information likely to improve supervision of the activities of firms falling within the scope of the Second Banking Directive.

1.3. The Commission points out (recital (2) of the draft directive under consideration) that on grounds of consistency the same rules should also apply to bodies which are not subject to the Second Banking Directive, but which in various ways perform financial activities regulated by other directives: the collective investment undertakings (UCITS) covered by Directives 85/611/EEC<sup>(5)</sup> and 93/22/EEC<sup>(4)</sup> and non-life insurance and life assurance companies (Directives 92/49/EEC<sup>(6)</sup> and 92/96/EEC<sup>(7)</sup>).

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 204, 21.7.1998.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ L 322, 17.12.1977.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ L 386, 30.12.1989.

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ L 141, 11.6.1993.

<sup>(5)</sup> OJ L 375, 31.12.1985.

<sup>(6)</sup> OJ L 228, 11.8.1992.

<sup>(7)</sup> OJ L 360, 9.12.1992.

1.4. The draft directive therefore authorises Member States to conclude cooperation agreements with any authority in a third country likely to possess and exchange information on the bodies mentioned in point 1.3 above, provided that the information disclosed is subject to appropriate guarantees of professional secrecy.

## 2. Comments

2.1. As the Commission says, the draft directive is consistent with an approach which seeks to make the supervision and control of financial activities more effective, in whatever form and by whomsoever they are exercised. The Economic and Social Committee can therefore only give its own agreement and support to the Commission's initiative.

2.2. However, the ESC wishes to express some concern about the list of entities in third countries authorised to

exchange information: alongside those indicated (supervisory authorities, bodies involved in liquidation or bankruptcy proceedings and relevant monitoring bodies, auditors etc.), it would not be inappropriate to include bodies responsible for preventing money-laundering and fraud. It is clear that the rules covering the activities of such bodies — and their very nature, different from that of control authorities — can make the exchange of information difficult. However, in some cases goodwill and the supremacy of the public interest could prevail over purely formal considerations or restrictive interpretations of legal provisions.

2.3. Inclusion of the bodies mentioned in point 2.2 above would have two advantages: on the one hand, it would provide timely information to the supervisory bodies on facts which, if discovered in time, could avert disastrous consequences (cf. the notorious BCCI case); while on the other, it would in some cases assist the fight against organised crime — a subject covered in a separate opinion which the Committee is in the process of drafting.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

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

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## **Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Use of public and private transport in the urban and periurban environment'**

(2000/C 168/02)

On 21 October 1999 the Economic and Social Committee decided, under Rule 23(3) of the Rules of Procedure, to draw up an opinion on the above-mentioned subject.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for drawing up the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 6 April 2000. The rapporteur was Mr Tosh.

At its 372nd plenary session (meeting of 27 April 2000), the Committee adopted the following opinion unanimously.

### **1. Introduction**

1.1. This own-initiative opinion comes as a response to the Committee's concern as to the level of congestion now being experienced in virtually all urban and periurban environments to greater or lesser degrees, the key impact of high traffic levels, the relatively random patterns of car usage and the adequacy and responsiveness of public services. Specifically concerning are:

- the impact and proximity of emissions and noise on the most densely populated areas reducing the air quality for both residents and commuting workers;
- the impact on the economy where both journey times and congestion gridlock have increased transportation costs and decreased performance and de facto damaged competitiveness;
- the impact on mobility for individuals where access times for work, social and leisure pursuits are lengthening and where current modes perform indifferently.

1.2. The Committee considers the right of access to urban transport a basic right of all individuals<sup>(1)</sup>. Where constraints become necessary due to social, economic, environmental or other reasons, the trade-offs must be designed to recognise the need to improve the urban environment and create an environment where business can sustain and co-exist competitively with people whose quality of living is measurably enhanced. Access to mobility does not necessarily imply unbridled mobility by car.

<sup>(1)</sup> See also ESC opinion on 'Services of general interest', OJ C 368, 20.12.1999.

1.3. The Committee's opinion signals its concern, together with its observations and suggestions, which should merit consideration in the formulation of policy and budget priorities for transportation in the next spending round, both for Member States and, importantly, for enlargement candidate countries.

### **2. Underlying features of the present situation**

2.1. The Committee recognises the complexity of the matrix components that have subscribed to the current status of transport and traffic flows in urban and periurban areas. Principally:

- wider car ownership and the affinity to car usage for personal transport with its perceived advantages;
- the legacy of insufficient investment in infrastructure and public transport modes in some Member States, at times resulting from a lack of provisional planning. Logistics management systems for moving goods and people should be optimised in all Member States in order to create genuine options as demand has changed;
- the nature of spatial planning with re-generation concepts slowly beginning to re-define urban environments where hitherto urban sprawl prevailed. Recognition of the interdependency of spatial and transport planning is fundamental;
- the increased affluence in different regional urban environments, which permits lifestyles with wider choices and attendant mobility requirements;
- the concern for personal safety in urban areas, where such fears are confirmed by rising crime statistics and survey outcomes;

— the scarcity of available space, where supply is constrained. Pricing mechanisms and/or fiscal measures will become necessary to assure a balance between use, demand and supply of road or fixed track space available.

2.2. The Committee faces difficulty in measuring the extent and character of congestion and the outcomes and costs attributable to it. There are various interest group evaluations, e.g. those of the Confederation of British Industry who claims that the additional cost to UK business from congestion is £ 16 bn annually.

2.3. It should be recognised that congestion results not only from network overload, which may well account for only one third albeit almost all in urban and periurban areas, but also from unsatisfactory traffic management, road-works, accidents, special events, weather conditions, public demonstrations, etc.

2.4. The Committee realises that solutions will be unique to each region's urban areas and that there can be no overall panacea. For this reason regional local dialogue should influence decisions. The following elements of this opinion comment on priorities the Committee believes to be relevant but do not attempt to feature every issue exhaustively.

### 3. Traffic Features

3.1. The compound aggregate growth in new vehicle registrations experienced in the 1960s through to the 1990s at annual levels of 6 % in Member States has now fallen to, at present, 4 % and is predicted by the Commission to decrease further to 1-2 % during the next 10 years. The reductions are not uniform and contain wide deviations. In faster growing countries such as Greece, Spain and Ireland 12 % annual growth in passenger cars per 1 000 inhabitants appears in the 1990s. In the UK and Germany car growth remained in the 4-6 % range annually up to 1997 (see appendix).

3.1.1. The evidence that a plateau in vehicle density is approaching at 500 cars per 1 000 inhabitants is less than convincing. Vehicle number registrations have seen a 250 % growth in the 30 years to 1999 and EU projections show a 30 % compound growth from today to 2020. The present congestion problems may not be accelerating to gridlock but nevertheless remain serious, because Europeans live in urban and periurban environments.

3.2. Improvements can be noted in vehicle safety standards and engine performance where new cars must meet more stringent pollutant and CO<sub>2</sub> emission limits (e.g. 140mg/km for CO<sub>2</sub> by 2008). Lower pollutant emissions will progressively deliver improved air quality to urban areas but without it becoming satisfactory.

3.3. Noise level growth and the visual impact of car-jammed roads, especially in periurban areas, remain as unattractive impinging features.

3.4. Public transport options are of serious concern to the Committee but instead of anticipating both cross-urban and intra-urban mobility they tend in practice to operate along radial routes. Only minibuses and taxis seem to move to demand and this is the attraction for car use also. Public systems could similarly be more flexible and demand-led. The possibilities of navigational management systems such as GPS and Galileo to improve average journey speed and to improve allocation and prioritisation of road space for public modes remain largely unexploited. Champions do exist in Munich, Turin, Zurich, Vienna, Grenoble, Copenhagen and Amsterdam.

### 4. Land-use Planning

4.1. The growth of cities has led to much more complex journey patterns with much suburb to suburb traffic which is not congenial to fixed route public transport.

4.2. Expedient planning decision-making or the lack of it has seen urban sprawl contributing to and inducing increased mobility needs, to access schools, hospitals, shopping centres and new housing markets. The relationship between design, density, land-use mix, energy consumption and mobility is poorly understood. However, the compact city, or its urban form with its various self-sufficient subcentres, contributes to shorter journey lengths and substantial reductions in individual car use.

### Recommendations

#### 5. Environmental

The Committee believes:

5.1. that tough standards for air quality and noise levels in urban environments should be enforced and deviations addressed with the appropriate benchmark remedies;

5.2. that town centre management needs to embrace and champion transportation as a key success entity. The wider use of closed-circuit television monitoring and community policing will help increase safety;

5.3. consideration should be given to preferential status and/or limited access to inner urban areas for public transport and low emission vehicles whose whole-life impact of energy consumption and emission levels will be the determinant choice factors.

## 6. Congestion

The Committee believes that the EU should seek to influence Member States to:

6.1. create a uniform measure by which urban and periurban congestion will be determined and set minimum regional levels of service for both public and private transportation modes. Quantitative measures of the cost to the economy, of mobility levels, air quality and noise levels associated with such aspirations will serve to convey their value to the public;

6.2. extend current best practice initiatives to develop telematics<sup>(1)</sup> to improve management of roads and rail assets for urban areas and through traffic;

6.3. seek to capture the interest and commitment of local Communities to encourage and assist modifications in journey patterns to work and school in order to balance resource use;

6.4. balance the allocation of road area for all users — cars, delivery vehicles, buses, motor-cyclists, cyclist and pedestrians — stagger use over a wider daily time-frame and optimize allocation to public modes;

6.5. employ more sophisticated urban delivery systems and practices and utilise logistics for all goods movements;

6.6. use best affordable construction and surfacing materials and maintain them properly. Pavements should incorporate 'smart' provisions to recognise their role for utility services;

6.7. engineer realistic shifts to walking and cycling for appropriate journeys;

6.8. adopt and enforce priority measures including high-occupancy vehicle lanes and other lane-management measures on motorways which can represent an alternative to road user charges by facilitating the allocation of limited road space favouring most efficient modes;

6.9. consider introducing zonal parking space charges and restrictions on parking duration;

6.10. review the possibility for public transport and/or pedestrian-only areas in inner cities where this is the only sustainable option.

## 7. Land-use Planning

The Committee's concerns would be allayed if regions:

7.1. sensitively addressed the development and re-generation of urban areas and made it possible to recover marginal brown-field industrial lands for next generation investment locations;

7.2. advocated the evolution of subcentres and suburban development where mixed housing, entertainment and leisure facilities, retailing and general services were provided to re-establish urban and periurban communities, which would be largely self sustaining and planned for public transport;

7.3. reflected on the extension of out of town shopping and leisure centres, particularly to motorway served greenfield sites, which are obviously private car-use inducing and difficult to service with buses, excluding non-car owners in the process. This evolution is reminiscent of American sprawl with its attendant high energy consumption and environmentally damaging land-use. The availability of low-price fuel in the precincts of these out of town shopping centres further increases their attraction.

## 8. Green Modes

The Committee sees simple and low-cost improvements which are available to Member States through the:

8.1. creation of cycle ways and the improvement of walking surfaces, where possible located apart from motorised modes;

<sup>(1)</sup> See ESC opinion on 'Telematics applications for transport in Europe', OJ C 18, 22.1.1996.

8.2. encouragement of children and parents to develop walking habits, e.g. on the way to school where this is demonstrably safe;

8.3. encouragement of employers to adopt incentives/best practice methods for workers to car-share or use public transport and discourage 'sole occupancy' of company car parking spaces. The example of orange travel cards subsidised by employers can be seen operative in Ile de France.

## 9. Public Transport

This opinion focuses on initiatives to combat congestion and improve mobility and would comment that:

9.1. it has been asserted in previous opinions<sup>(1)</sup> that better quality public transport is an imperative to support mobility per se, and it needs asserting;

9.2. some restrictions including clear regulatory measures on car access to inner cities must be seriously considered alongside improved park and ride facilities with exceptions for special cases. Other forms of inter-modality such as 'hybrid' solutions and new forms of car ownership as they are found in Germany and Edinburgh, are equally important;

9.3. links that recognise the greater complexity of journey patterns need to be established using appropriate buses or public modes. Public transport operates effectively only as a system. There is need for co-ordination and co-operation between operators and/or modes to offer potential customers the high quality of service the car provides;

9.4. the establishment and subsequent surveillance of priority routes and bus lanes at the edge of and into urban areas would ensure greater reliability and predictability in public transport performance and enhance it as an option. Consideration of prioritising through-traffic on freeways in the precincts of urban areas, would ensure their optimal use.

## 10. Final Comments

10.1. The Committee would signal that operating in the 21st century requires urban transportation solutions that reflect where and how society believes it must position itself, with mobility and the quality of air and life occupying prime consideration alongside sustainable competitive industry. Selective application of private car road and parking space user charges must be embraced in areas experiencing intractable congestion and/or severe environmental degradation, and where political, financial or economic constraints limit road capacity. Such areas would include both commercial and residential centres, historic cities etc.

10.2. Universal service obligations to provide transportation can not be overlooked. Solutions must distinguish between car ownership and car use to avoid demonising the use of the car given its role in generating mobility into work for those impaired and those living in rural environments where no public transport is available, and the social experience linked to the private car. For these reasons reliance on pricing methods alone is unlikely to be either fair or effective.

10.3. The Committee would further signal that if and when road pricing is adopted, then the excess funds generated locally should be ring-fenced for investment in transport initiatives in that local domain, whereby the process of hypothecation will ensure widest value impact for all urban users and prevent the diluting and diverting of funds for other purposes. Precedents exist in the German S-Bahn model.

10.4. It is all too routinely recognised that public transport is uncomfortable, under-developed, under-performing and failing in its role as prime people mover. Mending this needs equal measures of political will and public-private finance partnerships to back regionally developed infrastructure and systems investment which in turn dove-tail into national and EU plans that further coherently environment-friendly transport. Regional fora that exist to manage socio-economic development should be the responsible management bodies. In this context the Committee supports the Commission in its planned revision of Regulation (EEC) No 1191/69 and the introduction of quality criteria for public transport. This opinion also intends to be a basic paper for the coming updating of the Commissions' Citizens' Network Initiative. Special attention must be given to the situation in the Central and Eastern European countries.

<sup>(1)</sup> See ESC opinion on 'Developing the Citizens' Network — Why good local and regional passenger transport is important, and how the European Commission is helping to bring it about' (COM(1998) 431 final), OJ C 138, 18.5.1999.



10.5. Integrated regional planning decisions need to show rigorous evaluation of the provisions and standards of use for public transportation for the lifetime of the submitted plans, which will include sensitivity analyses of the limits of use and standards that can be maintained.

10.6. The Committee believes that research, modelling the impact of Internet shopping, home-working, increased leisure

journey patterns, just-in-time deliveries, the development of social conscience and greening values on transport, in particular for urban areas, will be essential if the EU is to give positive direction to future policy. It would be unthinkable that 'old' experience would be applied to the transport spend for enlargement. The prospect that hyper-mobility might evolve unplanned as the monster to gridlock our major conurbations would be profiled and avoided.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

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

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APPENDIX

**to the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**

**Motorization**

**Number of passenger cars per 1 000 inhabitants**

	B	DK	D	EL	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	EU15	Index 1970 =100
1970	214	218	194	26	70	234	133	189	212	197	160	49	155	284	214	184	100
1980	321	271	330	89	202	341	217	313	353	322	298	94	257	347	277	291	158
1990	388	309	447	171	309	466	227	483	480	368	387	187	389	421	360	401	218
1991	397	309	460	173	322	474	233	501	496	369	397	204	384	420	360	410	223
1992	400	310	471	177	336	476	241	518	512	373	410	205	384	414	360	418	227
1993	408	312	479	189	344	479	249	520	523	376	421	224	370	409	366	423	231
1994	422	312	488	199	351	478	262	540	540	383	433	242	368	409	372	432	235
1995	428	319	495	211	362	478	265	553	559	364	447	258	372	411	374	437	238
1996	435	330	500	223	376	477	272	571	558	370	458	277	379	413	388	447	243
1997	441	338	504	238	389	478	310	577	565	372	469	297	377	419	399	454	247

Source: DG Transport calculations

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on:**

- the 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of a training programme for professionals in the European audiovisual programme industry (MEDIA — Training) (2001-2005)', and
- the 'Proposal for a Council Decision on the implementation of a programme to encourage the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works (MEDIA Plus — Development, Distribution and Promotion) (2001-2005)'

(2000/C 168/03)

On 6 March 2000 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposals.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 6 April 2000. The rapporteur was Mr Hernández Bataller.

At its 372nd plenary session of 27 April 2000 the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion with 111 votes in favour and one abstention.

**1. Introduction**

1.1. The industries connected with the information society, particularly the audiovisual industry, are one of the sectors in the European Union with the greatest potential for growth. Studies estimate that revenues in this market will increase by 70 % by 2005, an increase which could give rise to the creation of more than 300 000 highly skilled jobs over this period alone<sup>(1)</sup>.

1.2. Digitalisation, interactivity and technological convergence are profoundly changing the traditional audiovisual industry as a result of the emergence of new forms of design, production and distribution using new agents, new content and services and new, direct and derived modes of exploiting works.

1.2.1. Moreover, these changes are complementary to, rather than a substitute for, more traditional forms. In addition to the accelerating growth of digital television and new applications like on-line services, interactive television, video-on-demand (VOD) and electronic dissemination in cinemas, growth is also occurring in more traditional segments of supply like the sale of videos and the production and showing of cinematic works.

1.2.2. Against this background, the production of audiovisual content can be seen as a major added-value sector for the 21st century, potentially capable of promoting the development of a competitive European industry and, ultimately, economic growth in the European Union.

1.3. But if the audiovisual content industry is going to be able to fulfil its role of economic and entrepreneurial engine, it will be necessary to tackle appropriately certain basic challenges of a structural nature. These are in some cases challenges facing the whole of the industry, such as diminishing revenue from each showing (with greater fragmentation of the audience) and the effective internationalisation of means of exploitation; in other cases, however, they are specifically European weaknesses:

- The fragmentation of national and regional markets, which impedes the transnational movement of programmes in Europe.
- The low level of investment in the planning and execution of audiovisual projects, which in turn diminishes the profitability of works and reduces the capacity for future investment.
- The insufficient capitalisation of companies which weakens their international development strategy.

1.4. The European audiovisual content industry is weak. It is not yet able to withstand growing international competition; this makes it necessary to draw up financing strategies concentrating on boosting international development, integration, distribution and marketing capacity. It is essential that governments support these initiatives by means of specific and complementary financial measures aimed at increasing the product range, particularly in the most innovative segments of the market. The quality of European production — thanks to more effective training — and the capacity to establish a position in a global market, thus increasing market share, can increase European audiovisual content producers' share of the industry's revenues.

<sup>(1)</sup> Study carried out for the Commission by Norcontel Ltd, Economic Implications of New Communications Technologies on the Audiovisual Markets, final report, 15 April 1997.

1.5. Since 1997 the Commission has been engaged in a detailed study of its audiovisual policy in order to take account of the current and future implications of the advent of the digital age. These activities have included the Media II programme<sup>(1)</sup>, the remarks and contributions received in response to the report from the High-Level Group on Audiovisual Policy<sup>(2)</sup> and the consultation of professional circles carried out by the Commission at the conferences held in Birmingham (April 1998) and Helsinki (September 1999), as well as the Green Paper on the convergence of the telecommunications, media and information technology sectors<sup>(3)</sup>.

## 2. Commission proposal

2.1. The aim of the Commission proposal for the Media Plus programme is to establish optimum conditions based on a coherent strategy and with clear objectives so as to continue to help alleviate the problems identified by the European audiovisual industry, enabling players to occupy an optimum position in the new markets.

2.1.1. The approach adopted to supporting European players must be pragmatic and must be adapted to the needs of the audiovisual market, with particular attention for structural measures. It also has to boost the added value associated with the common European area and the cultural and national diversity of the Member States.

2.1.2. In the light of the above, the following are needed:

- An information and monitoring system for the new needs and developments of the audiovisual market, together with the exchange of experience between the Member States in order to establish effective synergies.
- Emphasis on transnational dissemination of European audiovisual works, both within and outside the European Union.
- Complementarity and coherence with other Community measures following a common strategy, such as the education and training programmes, the support programmes for SMEs and information society technologies, the e-Europe initiative<sup>(4)</sup>, the User-friendly information society programme of the 5th Framework Programme for

Research and Technological Development<sup>(5)</sup>, the INFO 2000 and MLIS programmes, other training programmes like Socrates and Leonardo, collaboration with institutions like Eureka<sup>(6)</sup> etc.

- The desired complementarity with policies implemented at national and regional level, with greater consideration for the specific needs of the industries in countries with lower audiovisual capacities and/or restricted geographic and linguistic area.
- The application of aid at those stages of the audiovisual chain where intervention can bring greater added value (mainly at the beginning and end of the production process).
- The appropriate and systematic evaluation of aid, together with suitable adjustments and greater use of automatic support mechanisms based on market performance.
- The carrying out of pilot projects which, having achieved convincing results, will make it possible to adapt the programme's main aid mechanisms immediately<sup>(7)</sup>.
- The extension of cooperation with third countries which share the European Union's objectives in terms of audiovisual content policy.

2.2. Like the Media II programme, the activities provided for under the MEDIA Plus programme concentrate aid on two different areas of activity: education and vocational training (Article 150 of the Treaty) and industry (Article 157 of the Treaty)<sup>(8)</sup>, which includes project development, production, distribution, marketing and promotion.

2.2.1. To this end two proposals for Council decisions have been drawn up, the aim of which is the application of a policy geared to market characteristics and to optimising the advantages which the European audiovisual content industry can derive from technological progress.

2.2.2. The financial aid arrangements will be periodically reviewed and adjusted. On the basis of these reviews, the Commission may propose complementary activities for both instruments.

(1) ESC Opinion on the proposal for a Council Decision on the implementation of a training programme for professionals in the European audiovisual programme industry (Media II — Training) OJ C 256, 2.10.1995.

(2) The Digital Age: European Audiovisual Policy, report of the High-Level Group on Audiovisual Policy, Luxembourg, 1998.

(3) COM(97) 623 final and COM(1999) 108 final; ESC Opinion, OJ C 214, 10.7.1998; the conclusions of the Birmingham and Helsinki conferences are available at the following web sites: <http://europa.eu.int/eac> and <http://presidency.finland.fi>.

(4) e-Europe — an information society for all, COM(1999) 687 final.

(5) ESC Opinion on the fifth framework programme for research and technological development (1998-2002), OJ C 407, 28.12.1998.

(6) Audiovisual Eureka is a pan-European intergovernmental organisation established in 1989 with the aim of promoting the European audiovisual industry. It has 35 members (the Member States, the European Commission and the Council of Europe with associated member status).

(7) OJ C 343, 11.11.1998, pp. 10 to 16.

(8) The Media II programme was also based on two Council Decisions: in the field of training (Article 127 of the Treaty) the programme was implemented by Council Decision 95/564/EC of 22 December 1995, OJ L 321, 30.12.1995, p. 33; in the field of development and distribution (Article 130 of the Treaty), the programme was implemented by Council Decision 95/563/EC of 10 July 1995, OJ L 321, 30.12.1995, p. 25.

2.3. In the field of training (Media Training), the measures proposed are mainly aimed at:

- application of the new technologies to the production and distribution of audiovisual programmes with a high artistic value and a strong commercial potential;
- exploitation of the development potential of the European and international market;
- economic management at European and international level, including the legal aspects, financing of production, marketing and distribution;
- writing techniques, in particular for interactive programs intended for the new means of electronic dissemination.

2.4. The development and production of high-quality audiovisual programmes capable of generating substantial income on a growing number of media calls for considerable investment. Media Plus support must start at the stage of preparing the projects through adequate development to determine the feasibility of the project, the expected profitability of the work in the light of the cost of its production, and its commercial potential. This process, which is widespread in other sectors of industry, remains too restricted in the case of audiovisual works and often leads to the production of projects of limited economic viability.

2.5. The support for distribution and marketing is the most important chapter of the action in the framework of the proposed Media Plus programme, as it directly concerns the amortisation and profitability of the investment which is essential to ensure that European audiovisual content occupies a solid position in the market. This requires the creation, and above all, exploitation of catalogues of works, such as cinema films, drama, documentaries and cartoons which can be used and reused through different channels and in different formats.

2.6. The specific aims of aid to promotion are in general similar to those for aid to distribution. However, the mechanisms complementary to those established for distribution aim at improving access to European and international markets for European works and programmes.

2.7. The measures implemented under the development, distribution and promotion chapter must comply with the competition provisions of the Treaty, especially the rules on state aid.

### 3. General comments

3.1. The Committee supports the Commission proposal which contains complementary measures to promote the dissemination of the common cultural heritage, although it feels that:

- the financial resources earmarked for the Media Plus programme are insufficient to achieve the ambitious objectives set. The Committee therefore suggests that funding be increased. Market mechanisms in the sector are inadequate in some areas, given that the European financial sector generally does not participate in investment by the audiovisual sector, being unwilling to run risks in these sectors;
- this fact should be highlighted in the proposal, given that the promotion of our cultural identity is involved;
- it would be helpful if the sector were to have access to more data on the evaluation of previous programmes, as the existing data is inadequate;
- priority should in particular be assigned to technological development and innovation, as well as to improved distribution of funds;
- The Commission should set up a European information society agency which would help coordinate the various multimedia convergence initiatives.

3.2. Thus there exists a real need for the adoption of this proposal, first because of the added value its adoption will bring, and also because it will encourage the free movement across national frontiers of audiovisual works, strengthening and improving the competitiveness of the European audiovisual production industry as well as knowledge of the European cultural identity, all of which fully justifies Community intervention in this field.

3.3. However, the Committee regrets that the proposal has not taken account of the fact that the importance of the European audiovisual industry does not derive exclusively from its entrepreneurial dimension, but also from its role as a vehicle for the promotion of our culture and democratic values.

3.3.1. The recognition of the cultural dimension of the audiovisual industry, which has a unique product, explains the approach to the audiovisual media traditionally followed in Europe of aiming to strike a balance between:

- on the one hand, the right to freedom of expression and information, which is inseparable from any democratic society, and
- on the other hand, the defence of the general interest, the principle underlying the protection of minors, the fight against racism and xenophobia, the safeguarding of the right to privacy, the development of social cohesion and the guaranteeing of pluralism, among other objectives.

3.4. The proposal should evaluate the jobs which could be generated by its application. The audiovisual sector has strong growth potential in this area, and the Commission, in formulating and applying Community policies and measures, should always take account of the objective of achieving a high level of employment.

3.5. As for aid for training, this should be an instrument for promoting coordination between vocational training centres and universities, thus avoiding the danger of excessive dispersal of aid. The ESC hopes that operational criteria will be established ensuring that maximum use is made of the programmes and the corresponding financial resources, with greater emphasis being placed on education of young people.

3.5.1. At all events, it is considered important that there be an effective and lasting interconnection at European level between training centres and interested firms, in order to ensure a balance between basic and specialised training, thus underpinning the development of on-going training of audiovisual professionals, and exploiting opportunities for:

- distance learning using new technologies and applying these to the production of audiovisual works;
- innovative approaches to education offered by the new technologies, especially digital technology.

3.5.2. Suitable vocational training measures can improve the capacity for vocational integration and retraining, encourage the entrepreneurial spirit, especially by means of measures to stimulate technological innovation in favour of SMEs, and promote equality of opportunity between operators, at the same time as exploiting European cultural and linguistic diversity via the adoption of this kind of complementary measure.

At all events, every effort must be made to ensure that training is geared to actual realities, with the main stress being placed on education of young people.

3.5.3. The ESC proposes that the Commission include measures for the active promotion of greater participation by women in the implementation of the training programme, ensuring that women are in future better represented in the sector as this will encourage the sector's development.

3.6. As for measures to stimulate the development, distribution and promotion of audiovisual works, the Committee considers it necessary to create more favourable conditions for

the European audiovisual industry, promote the work of European audiovisual-sector firms and especially improve access to the market for independent firms. It also considers essential all measures which improve public access to the European audiovisual heritage by means of digitalisation and interconnection at European level, particularly educational measures. In principle, the ESC considers that emphasis should be placed more on the development of audiovisual works than on distribution and promotion.

3.6.1. The proposed cooperation measures between broadcasters should be developed, particularly activities involving specialised bodies, such as audiovisual Eureka, in order to implement joint measures that meet the programme objectives in the field of promotion.

3.6.2. Pilot projects should be developed in the framework of e-Europe in order to harmonise and coordinate all investment support measures in the audiovisual sector and exploit existing synergies between different aid mechanisms. The Committee reiterates the need for reports which are sufficiently detailed to enable the results so far achieved with the various instruments for promoting the audiovisual industry to be evaluated; the reports should be submitted for consideration by the other Community institutions and bodies.

3.6.3. The Committee welcomes the plans to provide for effective coordination with measures undertaken in the field of new technologies, in particular those provided for in the Fifth Framework Programme, as it is essential that the Community product be of high quality in order to justify the confidence to undertake research under the Framework Programme.

3.6.4. Effective incentive mechanisms need to be established for the financing of enterprises presenting groups of projects, with preference for automatic aid systems ensuring maximum transparency.

3.6.5. The ESC considers that priority should be given to products which can be marketed commercially over an extended period in various markets. With regard to the distribution of programmes, the Committee favours the promotion of subtitling, thus seeking a balance between respect for the integrity of the work, cultural variety, cost optimisation and audience preferences; subtitling and dubbing should be used in a complementary way, as technology is making the striking of such a balance increasingly practicable.

4. Finally, the Committee regrets that the Commission has not been more ambitious, from the financial and added value points of view, in the objectives set for the programme, specifically:

- the Committee reiterates that, in order to act in a more tangible way in the cultural field and promote the European cultural identity, giving it a political dimension, user awareness and information will be required as well as services to industry and the Member States. To this end, the Commission should set up a European Information Society Agency which would help coordinate the various initiatives in the field of multimedia convergence.
- This agency, proposed by the ESC on the basis of the Oulu Declaration, could be an effective and non-bureaucratic channel for financing, cooperation and coordination in the various areas, spanning the whole production-distribution chain, providing a distinctive European 'label' and making combined use of the financing instruments provided.
- other promotion instruments should be established in the audiovisual sector, such as the Guarantee Fund, the establishment of which has been proposed by the Commission but which is currently blocked.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

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

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**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the distribution of authorisations among Member States received through the Agreements between the European Community and the Republic of Bulgaria and between the European Community and the Republic of Hungary establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of Combined Transport'**

(2000/C 168/04)

On 10 April 2000 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 71 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 6 April 2000. The rapporteur was Mr Kielman.

At its 372nd plenary session (meeting of 27 April 2000) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 111 votes to one with one abstention.

## 1. Introduction

1.1. On 7 December 1995, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate one or more agreements on road transit with Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria with a view to resolving the problem of road goods transport relations between Greece and the other Member States, in particular through the mutual exchange of road transport authorisations.

1.2. The Commission initially endeavoured to conclude a multilateral agreement. However, the three countries concerned preferred separate agreements. These will lapse automatically when the three countries accede to the European Union.

1.3. The Commission proposal is based on the Proposal for a Council Decision concerning the signature and conclusion of the Agreements between the European Community and the Republic of Bulgaria establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of Combined Transport (COM(1999) 666 final). However, the ESC opinion covers only the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the distribution of authorisations among Member States received through the Agreements between the European Community and the Republic of Bulgaria and between the European Community and the Republic of Hungary establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of Combined Transport (COM(1999) 667 final).

1.4. The Commission has reached agreement with Hungary and Bulgaria, but not yet with Romania. That is why the proposal under consideration relates only to a Council decision to conclude agreements with Hungary and Bulgaria. The Commission certainly intends to reach agreement with Romania as well in the near future, since the practical value of the agreements with Hungary and Bulgaria would otherwise be minimal.

1.5. Since in the past high, discriminatory fiscal and parafiscal levies were often imposed on road transport in Eastern Europe, the agreements lay down that only non-discriminatory levies or tolls linked with the use of infrastructure may be charged. No special levies or taxes may be introduced for the transport activities themselves.

1.6. It is expressly laid down in the agreements that the authorisations for transit through Bulgaria and Hungary can be used only by vehicles which meet at least the Euro 1 standard.

1.7. In the proposal for a Council Decision to conclude the agreements with Bulgaria and Hungary, it is noted that the 13 000 authorisations received annually from Bulgaria and the 12 500 received annually from Hungary will be distributed among Member States by a separate Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council. The purpose, therefore, of the proposal under consideration is to distribute these authorisations among the Member States.

## 2. General comments

2.1. The Commission has used the Hungarian transit statistics as the basis for calculating the distribution of transit authorisations.

2.2. Given that the Union's objective in the negotiations is to facilitate transit traffic between Greece and the other Member States along a corridor through Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, the Hungarian transit statistics are the most relevant. At all events these statistics must clearly show that journeys with destinations 'in the other Member States' have passed through the complete corridor comprising Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. Special attention must be paid to journeys passing through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

2.3. The available Hungarian transit statistics are subdivided by:

- the country of departure;
- the country of registration of the vehicle.

On the basis of these data it is possible to select those journeys which:

- start in Greece;
- are carried out by vehicles registered in each Member State.

2.3.1. Given that the Hungarian transit statistics for the first three quarters of 1998 are available and usable, the Commission proposes to use them as a basis for the distribution among the Member States.

2.3.2. The Committee takes the view that, given the shortage of reliable statistics on road transit traffic, the decision to use the available Hungarian statistics for the first three quarters of 1998 provides the most relevant data.

2.3.3. It wishes to point out, in any case, that the participation of Romania is essential for the proper operation of the corridor between Greece and other Member States. In this context it therefore calls on the Commission to pursue the negotiations with Romania energetically and seek to complete them as soon as possible.

### 3. Specific comments

3.1. On the basis of the Hungarian transit statistics, the Commission notes that the total number of transits through Hungary with their origin in Greece by vehicles registered in one of the Member States in the first three quarters of 1998 was 6 723. Of these journeys 6 646 — i.e. almost 99 % — were made by vehicles registered in Greece. For four Member States — Spain, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal — no such journeys were recorded (see appendix).

3.2. On the basis of these — provisional — data, the Commission states that it 'is not considered opportune that some 99 % of the authorisations be given to Greece'. The Committee takes the view that objective criteria must be followed in order to reflect the real situation. It would therefore urge the Commission to obtain more precise data as soon as possible, giving a reliable picture so that Greece can be treated in the same way as any other Member State.

3.3. The Commission proposes to give a fixed allocation of 100 authorisations to each Member State, this being just under 1 % of the total authorisations available, and to distribute the remaining authorisations among Member States in proportion to the actual number of transit journeys through Hungary made in the first three quarters of 1998.

3.3.1. The Committee takes the view that, given that four Member States had no such transit journeys at all in the first three quarters of 1998 and another six Member States had fewer than five, the flat-rate 100 authorisations for each Member State proposed by the Commission is far too high. It suggests that the number be reduced to 50. That would leave an extra 750 authorisations which could be distributed in proportion to the number of transit journeys in the first three quarters of 1998.

In the Committee's view such a distribution would be fairer and more realistic.

3.4. This means that the number of flat-rate authorisations would be 750 instead of the 1 500 proposed by the Commission, and in addition that Greece would receive 12 109 authorisations for use in Bulgaria (instead of 11 368) and 11 614 for use in Hungary (instead of 10 874).

3.4.1. This method of calculation also does more justice to the consideration which the Commission itself includes in its proposal for a regulation, namely that 'the allocation of authorisations should be based on criteria that take full account of existing land transport flows between Greece and the other Member States'.

3.5. The Committee supports the idea expressed by the Commission in Article 4 of the draft regulation: that before 15 September of each year the Member States should return to the Commission the authorisations not likely to be used before the end of that year, so that they can be made available to other Member States.

3.6. If the Commission agrees with the ESC's idea for a fairer distribution key, this would entail a corresponding modification of the annex to the draft regulation.

### 4. Summary and conclusions

4.1. The Committee takes the view that the Commission's choice of the Hungarian transit statistics provides a suitable statistical basis for a possible distribution of the authorisations.



4.2. In order to make authorisations usable in practice, the Committee regards an early agreement with Romania as being of great importance.

4.3. On the proposed distribution, the Committee points out that, when the statistics used show that one Member State would be entitled to a high percentage of the authorisations, that number of authorisations should in fact be allocated to that state.

4.4. Moreover, bearing in mind the small number of available authorisations, the Committee thinks it undesirable

to give each Member State a flat-rate allocation of 100 authorisations. It is clear from the available data that many of the Member States have little or no road transit traffic between Greece and other Member States. The Committee regards a flat-rate allocation of 50 authorisations per Member State as basically adequate.

4.5. The Committee agrees with the Commission's proposal that unused authorisations should be sent back to the Commission before 15 September each year, so that they can still be used by Member States which need them.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

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

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APPENDIX

**to the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**

**Distribution of authorisations between Member States**

The most recent Hungarian transit statistics available relate to the first three quarters of 1998. The number of transits of Hungary with origin 'Greece' by vehicles registered in one of the Member States in the first three quarters of 1998 were:

Country of Registration	Number of transits
Belgium	2
Denmark	6
Germany	20
Greece	6 646
Spain	0
France	1
Ireland	0
Italy	1
Luxembourg	0
Netherlands	29
Austria	11
Portugal	0
Finland	1
Sweden	4
United Kingdom	2
Total	6 723

**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

## Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Commission proposal on the prices for agricultural products (2000/2001)'

(2000/C 168/06)

On 13 March 2000 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 43 and 198 of the Treaty establishing the European 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 Strasser.

At its 372nd plenary session held on 27 April 2000, the Committee adopted the following opinion by 71 votes to 12 with eight abstentions.

### 1. Content of the Commission proposal

#### 1.1. Price proposals

1.1.1. In the introduction to its proposal the Commission refers to the decisions taken in May 1999 within the framework of Agenda 2000. Because of these decisions, institutional prices or amounts must now be fixed annually in only a few sectors. For the 2000/2001 marketing year it is necessary to fix the monthly increments for cereals and rice, the various prices and amounts in the sugar sector, the aid for silkworms, the basic price for sheepmeat and the basic price for pigmeat. The Commission is proposing that the so-called multiannual approach be continued, i.e. that the institutional prices and amounts for the sectors in question — with the exception of sugar — be fixed for an indefinite period.

1.1.2. In accordance with the Agenda 2000 decisions, the intervention price for cereals (currently EUR 119,19/tonne) is to be reduced by 7,5 % for the 2000/2001 marketing year to EUR 110,25/tonne and by a further 7,5 % for the 2001/2002 marketing year to EUR 101,31/tonne. At the same time the per hectare premium will be increased from the present EUR 54,34/tonne to EUR 58,67 and then EUR 63,00. The Commission is further proposing that the monthly increments be reduced from EUR 1/tonne/month to EUR 0,93 in 2000/2001 and EUR 0,85 from the 2001/2002 marketing year. The intervention period for Sweden, which at present runs from 1 December to 30 June, is also to be brought into line with the period applicable in all other Member States (apart from the southern ones).

1.1.3. The basic amount applicable to direct aid for oilseeds is to be reduced in three stages to the level for cereals and set-aside.

1.1.4. In accordance with the May 1999 decisions, the compulsory set-aside rate has been set at 10 % for the period 2000-2006. However, the rate can be altered in the light of market conditions.

1.1.5. The Commission is proposing that the monthly increments for rice be left unchanged at EUR 2/tonne/month.

1.1.6. In the case of sugar the proposal is that both the institutional prices (basic, minimum, intervention and guide) and the monthly reimbursement of storage costs be kept at the present level. The Commission points out that as part of the EU's commitments under GATT the production quotas for the 2000/2001 marketing year may have to be reduced in accordance with Article 26 of the basic regulation.

#### 1.2. Budgetary situation

1.2.1. In January 2000 the Commission estimated that appropriations totalling EUR 37,471 million were required for 2000. This is EUR 582 million more than provided for in the budget (as adopted by the Commission on 16 December 1999) and EUR 119 million more than the financial perspectives ceiling set by the Berlin European Council.

1.2.2. The Commission points out that its January estimate of EUR 37,471 million for EAGGF Guarantee Section appropriations took account of the fact that the economic assumptions and legal framework on which the budget was based had since changed. The Commission emphasises that the price proposals have no effect on the appropriation requirements for 2000, as estimated in January.

1.2.3. The rate of the euro against the dollar was fixed at 1:1,12 in the budget. If the average value of the euro throughout the financial year is USD 1,04, savings of around EUR 400 million could be made according to the Commission.

1.2.4. The appropriations required for sheep- and goatmeat, for the dairy sector and for wine and olives have been revised downwards, whereas for beef, textile plants and sugar they are now higher than at the time of the budget forecasts.

## 2. General comments

2.1. The Committee notes with regret that unlike previous years the Commission farm price proposals for 2000/2001 refer neither to the general situation in agriculture nor to trends in agricultural and food production, farm incomes or food prices.

2.2. The Committee would point out once again that it has repeatedly asked the Commission to examine the effects of the CAP — and especially the effects of lower producer prices for agricultural products — on consumer prices, food quality, the environment and employment, etc. The Committee notes that, in a paper published in February 2000 analysing the effects of the CAP reform, the Commission lists — inter alia — possible benefits for consumers. This paper covers, however, only some of the ground which the Committee thinks it should cover.

2.3. Already in last year's farm price opinion the Committee voiced concern about the trends in farm incomes in most EU Member States. The fear that the pressure on incomes would continue was unfortunately confirmed by the trends in 1999. According to Eurostat estimates, farm incomes dropped 2,8 % in real terms in 1999. The steepest drops were in Ireland (-11,7 %), Denmark (-10,5 %), Belgium (-9,1 %) and the Netherlands (-5,8 %). Countries where livestock production predominates were hardest hit, since prices for all livestock products (and especially for pigmeat) fell sharply. In some regions (Spain in the case of cereals, and Spain, Greece and Portugal in the case of olives) the earnings of many farmers have been hit by extremely poor harvests.

2.4. Given the unsatisfactory trend in farm incomes and the tight situation on major agricultural markets, the Committee considers that the CAP instruments available must be exploited to the full. The Committee also trusts that — apart from being necessary in the context of the WTO negotiations — last year's reform decisions will remain intact for the sake of the requisite continuity and that funds required and also agreed on for the reform will be made available.

2.5. At the Berlin European Council, the heads of state and government promised farmers that in all events the requisite funds would be provided for the reform measures. The Committee therefore thinks that the so-called 'margin' (the difference between the theoretical and actual ceiling on expenditure) must also be available for CAP measures, if

necessary. On no account can corrections be made to agreed measures in the first year after the reform's entry into force in order to make savings.

2.6. The Committee recognises that the programme for rebuilding Kosovo is necessary, but notes with satisfaction that at the March 2000 Lisbon summit, influential heads of state and government spoke out against the transfer of funds from the agricultural budget to the Balkan stability pact. The Committee trusts that the Commission will comply with this and will observe the Berlin Agenda 2000 decisions in full. This is necessary not least for the sake of its credibility.

2.7. The Committee would also refer to the opinion submitted by the agricultural committee of the European Parliament to the budget committee stating that the financial implications of special budgetary requirements must be split evenly between all budgetary headings.

2.8. Finally, the Committee would point to the difficulties facing important agricultural markets as a result of the growing pressure of imports. It trusts that the Committee will make efficient use of the instruments and budget funds available for marketing measures, and suggests an increase in funds. The Committee thinks that there are grounds for arguing that the budgetary funds provided for promoting the sale of ornamental plants and flowers should be deployed in the year 2000/2001, too, since any interruption will undermine the efficiency of proven marketing measures.

## 3. Specific comments

### 3.1. Cereals

3.1.1. The proposed cuts in the monthly increments are rejected by the Committee, since there is no objective justification for them. Storage costs are made up of not only financing costs but also other cost factors, such as staffing, building and energy costs. The costs are completely independent of the trend in the value of cereals as a commodity. The same is true of the general level of interest rates. The Committee would point out that a cut in the monthly increments would not only trigger a further drop in prices but would also reduce external protection.

3.1.2. The Committee supports, in principle, suitable measures for promoting quality production, but it regrets that the Commission tightened up the minimum criteria for intervention for the 2000/2001 marketing year at a time when producers were no longer able to adjust to these new conditions since autumn sowing had already taken place. This approach is also out of tune with last year's reform, since the tightening up clearly restricts intervention's function as a safety

net and will subsequently exert additional pressure on prices. The Committee accepts the provision about minimum grain size in the case of barley, but calls for the remaining intervention criteria to be reviewed when a decision is taken about the price package. It should not be overlooked that because of their dependence on the weather, farmers cannot influence all factors which are decisive for quality, such as water content or falling number in the case of rye.

3.1.3. In view of the tight situation on the cereals markets, the Committee would ask the Commission to check to what extent other world market suppliers help to take the pressure off the market and also, in the light thereof, to verify the compulsory set-aside rate for the marketing year 2001/2002.

3.1.4. The Committee welcomes the Commission proposal that the monthly increments for rice remain unchanged. The difficult situation facing rice producers demonstrates that basically it will also be impossible in future to dispense with the CMO instruments for rice.

### 3.2. Sugar

3.2.1. The Committee welcomes the Commission proposal that the institutional prices and storage cost reimbursements for sugar be left unchanged this time.

3.2.2. The Committee assumes that suitable action will be taken in time to reduce production quotas in order to comply with the EU's commitments under the Uruguay Round. In this way, the EU sugar industry will also be making an important contribution towards taking some sugar off the world market.

### 3.3. Flax and hemp

3.3.1. The Commission apparently assumes in the context of the budget for its price proposals that the proposed reform of the flax/hemp common market organisation will enter into force in the marketing year 2000/2001 already. The Committee regards this as unacceptable, since an appropriate preparatory period is necessary for implementation and discussion, as the Committee made clear in its opinion on flax and hemp grown for fibre. It calls on the Commission to take up the objections raised in that opinion and take sufficient account of them in its review of the reform proposals.

### 3.4. Fruit and vegetables

3.4.1. The Committee would point out that the practical implementation of the current EU threshold values for products processed from citrus fruits and the quota arrangements for products processed from tomatoes has caused difficulties and that these quantities must therefore be adjusted upwards. Therefore, steps should be taken to examine whether it would not be possible to take better account of production and market requirements by laying down national threshold values for processors of citrus fruits and tomatoes.

3.4.2. The Committee notes that low-price imports are steadily increasing the pressure on a number of special fruits and vegetables such as nuts, asparagus and garlic. Many jobs are threatened as a result, since most of these production sectors are very labour-intensive. The Committee therefore advocates that appropriate support measures be continued and/or that special safeguards be applied.

### 3.5. Animal products

3.5.1. The Committee welcomes the fact that the basic prices for sheep- and pigmeat are to remain unchanged and that no extra budgetary funds will be required for these sectors of production. However, the Committee would ask how, with beef prices falling in the wake of the Agenda 2000 reform (mid-year reduction of institutional prices by a further 6,7 %) and the comparatively high pressure exerted by imports, the Commission's optimistic price expectations for sheepmeat are to be fulfilled. Account should also be taken of the fact that sheepmeat is being imported from third countries more and more as chilled fresh produce rather than in frozen form, thereby exerting further pressure on prices on European markets.

3.5.2. The Committee notes that the institutional prices for beef are to be lowered in three stages under the Agenda 2000 reform and that no additional appropriations will be required for 2000. It trusts that the Commission will explore all avenues available to stabilise the beef market further.

3.5.3. The Committee notes critically that when the Commission attempts to push through joint EU-Member State

funding for the first time for a CMO measure, it just happens to pick on the school milk scheme which is so important for children and adolescents. The Committee trusts that a quick

decision will be taken to ensure the continuation of the school milk programme, in accordance with the Committee's opinion on the Commission proposal.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

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

### **Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Council Decision creating a European Refugee Fund'**

(2000/C 168/07)

On 6 March 2000 the Council, acting under Article 262 of the EC Treaty, asked the Economic and Social Committee for an opinion on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was instructed to prepare the Committee's work on this subject, adopted its opinion on 11 April 2000. The rapporteur was Mrs zu Eulenburg.

At its 372nd plenary session, held on 27 April 2000, the Committee adopted the opinion set out below, with 107 votes in favour and one abstention.

#### **General observations**

##### **1. Gist of the Commission's proposal**

Under the Proposal for a Decision, measures covering the reception of asylum-seekers, the integration of refugees and voluntary repatriation are brought together in an instrument which is to be valid for a period of five years.

The proposed European Refugee Fund is based on Article 63(2)(b) of the EC Treaty. The aim of the Fund is to promote 'a balance of effort between Member States in receiving and bearing the consequences of receiving refugees and displaced persons'.

Finance is thus to be allocated between the Member States in proportion to (a) the number of asylum-seekers whom they take in ( $\frac{2}{3}$ ) and (b) the number of refugees to whom they give accommodation in their territory ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ). Co-financing by the European Refugee Fund (ERF) is set at 50 %. The proportion can, however, be increased to 75 % in the case of Member States receiving support from the Cohesion Fund in order to help them compensate for a lack of the requisite facilities.

Two target groups are identified as beneficiaries of the measures to be funded by the ERF, namely: 'refugees' (persons having refugee status and asylum-seekers) and 'displaced persons' (persons who benefit from any form of international protection or have applied for such protection).

Priority is to be given to supporting concrete measures, focusing on, for instance:

- reception conditions: the development or adaptation of infrastructures and services for providing accommodation, material assistance (e.g. clothing or food), and social or administrative assistance in connection with the asylum procedure;
- integration facilities: the provision of assistance in finding accommodation, claiming social and medical benefits and taking part in language courses and help to enable people to provide for themselves, in particular, help in finding jobs;
- voluntary repatriation to the country of origin and reintegration into that country: the provision of information on available return programmes and the situation prevailing in the countries concerned, general educational measures and vocational training measures and actual resettlement;

- emergency measures: reception and accommodation, provision of means of subsistence and medical, psychological or other forms of care.

Responsibility for administering the projects and programmes is to be vested in the Member States, which are to draw up requests for co-financing, to be agreed upon with the Commission. It is however, proposed that the Commission may earmark 10 % of the available funding for innovative or cross-border projects with a view to promoting the exchange of experience and cooperation at EU level. The level of funding provided in the case of these projects may be up to 100 %.

## 2. Appraisal of the Proposal for a Decision

### 2.1. Basic assessment

The ESC welcomes the Proposal for a Council Decision.

As the ESC made clear in its opinion of 21 October 1999 on the Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community Action Programme to promote the integration of refugees<sup>(1)</sup>, 'since the issues of migration and integration will remain of considerable importance for the EU and its Member States in the future, the ESC ... will work for adequate funding for European assistance instruments.'

The future European Refugee Fund will be an essential instrument for a coherent response to the challenges facing the EU and its Member States with regard to the reception, integration and voluntary repatriation of refugees and displaced persons.

The ESC also welcomes the Commission's proposal that a separate budget heading be created in the ERF for emergency measures.

### 2.2. Bringing the aid on stream

The ESC calls for the Proposal for a Decision to be adopted swiftly in order to ensure continuity vis-à-vis the current measures financed under the budget headings for integration and aid in respect of reception conditions and voluntary repatriation. A lack of continuity in this important field could nullify the positive initial steps represented by the projects promoted by the EU and the establishment of networks and cooperation for the benefit of refugees.

### 2.3. Funding

The proposed funding for the ERF does not match the actual needs. As the Commission notes in the Financial Statement attached to the Proposal for a Decision, the funding allocated up until now 'fell far short of what was needed on the ground'.

If the ERF is to live up to the claim that it will help to bring about a balanced distribution of responsibility between the Member States, the planned funding of EUR 26 m. for structural measures and EUR 10 m. for emergency measures is far too little. The ESC therefore calls on the responsible parties to press for provision of adequate funding.

### 2.4. Target groups to benefit from measures financed by the ERF (Article 2)

The definitions of the target groups set out in the Commission's proposal fall short of the definitions given in earlier proposals. In the Committee's view, some points require more precise wording and appropriate adjustment.

The proposal for a Decision refers to the following target groups to benefit from measures financed by the ERF: 'refugees' (persons entitled to asylum and asylum-seekers) and 'displaced persons' benefiting from temporary protection arrangements) (Article 2). In the case of both groups the persons concerned are 'any third-country nationals or stateless persons'.

The definition of the residential status of the respective target groups is particularly important in the light of the various forms of protection applicable to refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons in the different EU Member States.

The ESC therefore takes the view that the Proposal for a Decision should be based on a broad definition which also embraces, as target groups eligible for ERF-funded measures, persons covered by additional forms of protection, such as the so called 'de facto' refugees who are not covered by the Geneva Convention or the term 'displaced person'.

Such a definition would be in line with the Joint Actions adopted hitherto by the Council.

The provision whereby beneficiaries have to be third-country nationals should be dropped so as not to exclude, as a matter of principle, asylum-seekers from other EU Member States from benefiting from the provisions of the ERF, despite the fact that only a small number of individual cases would be involved.

### 2.5. Tasks (Article 3)

As regards the measures for the reception of refugees the Proposal for a Decision falls short of the provisions set out in the Joint Action 1999/290/JHA of 26 April 1999 on the reception and voluntary repatriation of refugees and asylum-seekers.

<sup>(1)</sup> See OJ C 368, 20.12.1999.

The Proposal makes no explicit reference to measures as regards advice on asylum procedures, legal advice, the facilitation of access to legal procedures and legal aid. No mention is made either of support for persons in special need of protection. More specific provisions should, in the ESC's view, be set out in this context.

As regards measures for integrating refugees there are discrepancies between Article 3 and the Explanatory Memorandum and the Financial Statement. In the ESC's view, appropriate consideration should be given to the role of employment, education and training. Support should also be provided for action to facilitate the reunification of families, the payment of transport costs for impecunious refugees, family advisory and support structures for families whose members have long been separated from each other.

The Proposal for a Decision fails to make provision for measures for informing and educating the public, as set out in the Joint Action 1999/290/JHA. In view of the importance of such action for stimulating general awareness and eliminating prejudice, the ESC recommends that appropriate measures be included in the Proposal.

#### 2.6. *Community actions (Article 4)*

It is proposed that the Commission shall have the discretion to use 10 % of the funding for promoting cooperation at EU level.

The ESC welcomes the proposal that the Commission be able to set aside funding for innovative cross-border projects.

In the ESC's view, however, funding for trans-national cooperation, and cross-border exchange of information and transfer of expertise, should not be tied to the 10 % of funding set aside for measures at EU level.

It would, in the Committee's opinion, be a welcome development if, when selecting the projects for which applications are to be submitted and when drawing up national applications for co-financing, Member States would include and support trans-national measures, so that the EU-wide and trans-national experience of recent years is not lost as a result of the introduction of new administrative procedures.

Trans-national cooperation, involving the transfer of experience and information on successful models, can make an important contribution, particularly with regard to structural assistance in Member States which have hitherto implemented only small-scale reception-facility and integration schemes for refugees and displaced persons.

#### 2.7. *Selection criteria (Article 8) and the establishment of the proposed Committee of representatives of Member States (Article 19)*

Under Article 8 of the Proposal, the eligible organisations are to include NGOs and the social partners. Both of these parties have been playing a key role in the development and implementation of projects for many years.

Measures should therefore be taken to ensure that funding is not allocated exclusively to state bodies. The best way to achieve this is by issuing an invitation to submit proposals which would be open to all interested bodies.

Proper attention should be paid to NGOs and the social partners both at national level and by the European Commission, through the intermediary of the proposed committee (Article 19). NGOs, refugee organisations and the social partners could be given observer status at the meetings of the proposed committee. Provision should also be made for participation by the UNHCR.

In its opinion on the Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community action programme to promote the integration of refugees, dated 20 October 1999, the ESC pointed out that: 'As the integration of refugees is in many states achieved via programmes and initiatives of non-governmental organisations, these should where possible be explicitly mentioned here' (point 2.5.1 of the opinion); the recommendation that explicit mention be made of these organisations also applies to the draft decision under review.

#### 2.8. *Distribution of resources (Article 9)*

The Commission proposes that 65 % of funds be allocated on the basis of the number of asylum-seekers and 35 % on the basis of the number of persons granted refugee status or temporary protection.

It may be assumed that, under the proposed arrangements, a substantial part of the available resources will be allocated to states which already have complex reception and integration facilities for refugees and displaced persons and that those Member States which have less experience in this respect will receive a substantially smaller allocation from the ERF.

Such arrangements would negate the Article 11 provisions in respect of Member States receiving funding from the Cohesion Fund; they would also run counter to the aim, set out in the Explanatory Memorandum, 'that [encouragement be given] to those Member States with the least-developed infrastructure and services for asylum and refugees to make good the disparities in this area'.

The ESC therefore believes that the proposed distribution arrangements should be supplemented by a procedure under which the Commission would decide on the distribution of resources on the basis of the needs of the Member States and the quality of the applications submitted. It is also proposed, in this context, that a minimum amount of funding be made available to Member States catering for small numbers of refugees, irrespective of the quota arrangements.



### 2.9. *Timetable (Article 10)*

It is proposed that the decision should be in force for a period of five years.

Decisions on the amounts allocated under the budget and the proportions of overall funding to be allocated to the individual Member States are, however, to be taken on an annual basis, with the result that the Member State will not be in a position to make financial commitments in respect of multi-year projects.

Experience in recent years has demonstrated that projects that run for only one year are not very effective. Multi-year projects should therefore always be supported as a matter of principle.

The ESC therefore calls for the ERF to give priority to multi-year projects, with funding being granted on an annual basis.

### 2.10. *Financing structure (Article 11)*

The provision in the Proposal for a Decision whereby contributions from the ERF shall not exceed 50 % or, in specified cases, 75 % of the total cost of a given measure serves only to restrict the sum allocated by the Commission to national measures. Attention is drawn to the fact that, particularly in the case of measures implemented by NGOs and the social partners, overall public aid can amount to 100 % of the cost of the measure if the requisite co-financing is provided by the Member States.

### 2.11. *Monitoring and evaluation (Article 18)*

Under the Proposal for a Decision, the responsible authorities in the Member States are to send annual reports to the Commission and a mid-term report is to be drawn up by 31 December 2002. The new implementing procedures, together with the funding provisions still operational with effect from 2001 should, in the ESC's view, be reviewed by the Commission already in 2001, on the basis of the annual reports and an audit of the new system. Such an evaluation should embrace the distribution of funding, the implementation of national action plans and progress towards 'a balance of effort between the Member States', which the ERF is intended to achieve.

### 2.12. *Distribution of resources/Financial Statement, Article 2*

The ESC welcomes the provisional breakdown of funding for the three individual action areas (reception: 36 %; integration: 36 %; voluntary repatriation: 18 %); the ESC calls upon the Member States to gear their measures to this proposed

breakdown of allocations. In the ESC's view, the previous level of support should be continued, particularly in the case of integration projects.

### Specific observations

### 3. **Proposals for amending and supplementing the proposals put forward by the Commission**

#### 3.1. *Article 2*

For the purposes of this Decision, the target groups shall comprise the following categories:

- 1) 'refugees', meaning any third-country nationals or stateless persons having the status defined by the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 relating to the Status of Refugees and permitted to reside as refugees in one of the Member States;
- 2) 'displaced persons', meaning any third-country nationals or stateless persons benefiting in a Member State from temporary protection arrangements, supplementary protection arrangements or another form of international protection granted by a Member State;
- 3) 'asylum-seekers' meaning any third-country nationals or stateless persons who have applied to be given the status of a refugee or displaced person, as defined under 1) and 2) above;
- 4) 'refused asylum-seekers' meaning any third country nationals or stateless persons whose application to be granted the status of a refugee or displaced person, as defined in 1) and 2) above, has been rejected but who are, at the same time, not residing illegally in the Member State concerned;
- 5) third-country nationals or stateless persons who no longer require international protection and are eligible for voluntary repatriation.

#### 3.2. *Article 3(2)*

Amend to read as follows:

2. 'With regard to the conditions for reception of refugees and displaced persons and procedures, the actions may concern the following: the establishment or improvement of infrastructure, the provision of basic care, the improvement of administrative and legal asylum procedures (including the provision of advisory services, which may also include legal advice), special support for categories of persons in need of protection (such as unaccompanied minors, victims of violations of human rights, such as humiliating treatment, torture or rape and persons requiring special medical treatment), general education and vocational training, material aid and social services.'

3.3. *Article 3(3)*

3. 'As regards integration into the society of the Member State of residence of refugees and displaced persons, who are entitled to benefit from integration on the grounds of their status or following a certain period of residence, and members of their family, actions may be to provide social assistance in areas such as housing, means of subsistence and healthcare and measures to facilitate the reunification of families. Special support should be provided in the case of measures in the field of general education and vocational training and all measures for bringing about rapid and lasting integration into the labour market. In the interests of integration, preference should be given to measures which enable refugees to provide for themselves and lead a self-responsible life in the society of the Member State concerned.'

3.4. *Article 3(5) (new)*

5. 'In connection with the concrete programmes and measures financed under the ERF, a set percentage of the aid shall be earmarked for informing the public on obligations of the member States towards persons seeking international protection and on EU refugee policy.'

3.5. *Article 7(1)(e) (new)*

'Planned trans-national cooperation in connection with the measures.'

3.6. *Article 8(a) (re-numbering of existing second paragraph of Article 8)*

Amend to read as follows:

'Following a call for proposals, which shall be open to all project sponsors concerned, actions shall be presented by public authorities (national, regional or local, central or devolved), education or research institutions, training establishments, the social partners, government agencies, international organisations and their national bodies, or non-governmental organisations, operating individually or in partnerships, with a view to obtaining funding from the Fund.'

Final paragraph:

'Add the following at the end of this paragraph:'

3.7. *Article 8(b) (new) Trans-national measures*

'Trans-national measures are of special importance, particularly with regard to the exchange of experience and transfer of know-how with a view to promoting structural development. It is therefore proposed, that, where advisable, national project-sponsors make provision for trans-national cooperation in connection with national measures.'

3.8. *Article 9*

Amend to read as follows:

'When the available resources are being distributed between the Member States, a set basic amount shall be made available to states having less-developed asylum systems with a view to promoting structural development.'

The remaining resources shall be distributed between the Member States as follows:

- a) 65 % in proportion to the average number of persons having applied for a form of international protection registered over the previous three years; and
- b) 35 % in proportion to the number of persons granted refugee status or temporary protection over the previous three years.

The reference figures shall be the most recent figures established by the Statistical Office of the European Communities.

The Commission shall decide on the allocation of resources in the light of the quality of the applications received from the Member States, the needs of the respective Member States and the relevance of the actions proposed to the current guidelines.

The Commission shall take into account the need to promote effective asylum reception and integration work in Member States where this has been less-developed in the past.'

3.9. *Article 11*

Add the following at the end of this article:

'In cases where the requisite co-funding is provided by national bodies, total public funding may amount to 100 % of the cost of the measure, particularly in the case of actions carried out by NGOs and the social partners.'

3.10. *Article 18*

Amend to read as follows:

'3. The Commission shall submit to the European Parliament and the Council the annual reports of the Member States and, by 31 December 2002 at the latest, a mid-term report and, by 1 June 2005 at the latest, a final report.

The Commission shall also submit an appraisal to the European Parliament and the Council, by 31 March 2001, indicating the extent to which the new operating procedures and their

implementation by the Member States are meeting the objectives of the European Refugee Fund.'

3.11. *Article 19*

Add the following at the end of this article:

'Non-governmental organisations, refugee organisations and the social partners shall be involved in the work of this committee, as observers. Insofar as the ESC cannot be represented on the committee for reasons of comitology, it shall be consulted by this committee.'

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

*The President*

*of the Economic and Social Committee*

Beatrice RANGONI MACHIAVELLI

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers'**

(2000/C 168/08)

On 29 February 2000, the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Social, Family, Educational and Cultural Affairs, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 11 April. The rapporteur was Mrs Hornung-Draus.

At its 372nd plenary session (meeting of 27 April 2000) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion with 111 votes in favour and five abstentions.

## 1. Introduction

1.1. European citizenship means that under Article 18 of the EC Treaty, every national of a Member State has the right to move and reside freely in all the Member States. Nonetheless, this fundamental right of the individual is restricted by a series of disadvantages and difficulties which hamper the mobility of people seeking access to training and education beyond the borders of their home countries.

1.2. Freedom of movement applies to employees and self-employed workers and therefore also to teachers and trainers. However, this freedom must also apply to those people wishing to start or continue studies or training, or undertake voluntary work — not necessarily for professional purposes

— outside their own country and within the EU. If they decide to go to another EU country, whether this is in the context of a Community programme or not, the Community as a whole should make an effort to remove all administrative obstacles which might lie in their way.

The ESC therefore wholeheartedly welcomes the objectives of this recommendation. It sends out the right signals to the people of Europe at a time when enlargement of the European Union is about to take place and when the EU — as decided at the special summit meeting in Lisbon<sup>(1)</sup> — is preparing itself for the transition to the information and knowledge society so as to be able to cope with the demands of the globalisation of the economy.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 117 of 26.4.2000.

1.3. The promotion of transnational mobility plays a key role in steps to create a European knowledge society. Virtually unimpeded mobility is a prerequisite for achieving European integration — a Citizens' Europe — and for strengthening international competitiveness. Moreover, the teaching of 'European skills' increasingly constitutes a key criterion for the quality and attractiveness of vocational and general education. 'European' qualifications — such as language skills, knowledge about the various political, legal, social and economic systems in Europe and an understanding of the way of life of European neighbours — must be encouraged more by those responsible for education in the EU. National education systems must gear themselves to European developments and requirements; they need to be 'Europe-minded', that is open and transparent in the interests of all citizens.

1.4. Another key element for achieving mobility is a comprehensive information policy pursued in an active, even proactive fashion, by the European Commission and the Member States: people who are prepared to be mobile often experience difficulties in finding out what opportunities exist for making a stay abroad part of their vocational and continuing training. Without widely available, focused and comprehensible information for schools, technical colleges, job centres, universities and other educational institutions as well as firms, mobility will remain the privilege of those individuals whose teachers or trainers are especially committed. In this connection, the ESC proposes that some thought be given in the medium term to the extent to which it would be viable to re-introduce targeted, individual grants for people willing to be mobile, such as already exists in research. Here the experiences of previous generations of European educational programmes are valuable, such as the Petra and the Lingua programmes, where such individual grants were available and widely taken up.

1.5. Knowledge of foreign languages is also of considerable importance for the employability of workers and the competitiveness of firms, as well as for the European economy as a whole. More mobility in Europe would also extend the opportunities for the people of Europe to learn more foreign languages. At the same time however, it is precisely a lack of knowledge of foreign languages which constitutes a major obstacle to mobility. For this reason, the ESC welcomes the Commission initiative in declaring the year 2001 the European Year of Languages. One of the stated aims is to give as many people as possible an understanding of the advantages of knowing foreign languages. In addition to the personal development and understanding of other cultures that this would bring, the importance of languages for an individual's employability will be highlighted; this can be boosted by a period of training or further training abroad.

## 2. The recommendation

2.1. The recommendation is subdivided into general recommendations for all categories of people and specific recommendations for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers.

2.2. Experience in the Community's Petra, Comett, Leonardo Da Vinci and Socrates training programmes and in the ESF Community initiatives on human resources, led the Commission as early as 1996 to submit its Green Paper on Education — Training — Research: the obstacles to transnational mobility. In this Green Paper the Commission emphasizes that the different circumstances of students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers in the various Member States, particularly as regards industrial law, social security law and tax law, does hamper their mobility. This document provides the basis for the recommendation now being put forward by the Commission, which, in contrast to the Green Paper, has left out the whole issue of the research sector and focuses on general and vocational education and training.

## 3. Comments

### 3.1. General comments

3.1.1. The recommendation proposes that Member States show themselves ready to eliminate those obstacles to mobility which persist despite the *acquis communautaire* stipulating freedom of movement for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers.

3.1.2. In addition, measures should be adopted ensuring that third country nationals who are legally and permanently resident in the Community benefit from the provisions of the *acquis communautaire* relating to freedom of movement and equality of treatment and from the provisions of the recommendation. Member States should agree to treat permanently resident third country nationals in the same way as Community nationals when they are undertaking studies, a period of training, voluntary work or providing teaching or training within the framework of a Community programme.

The Economic and Social Committee very much welcomes the fact that the recommendation is strongly geared to tackling third country problems. Especially in the run-up to enlargement and against the background of the current intergovernmental conference, this sends out a positive signal to candidate countries. In order to build up a smoothly operating, expanded Union, the citizens of the candidate countries must also have the opportunity to experience the European Union. This can be achieved right now as part of the pre-accession strategy for the candidate countries on the basis of the Europe agreements which have been concluded with them. In particular, more use should be made of the Cedefop study visit programme as part of the Leonardo programme, in order to build up and promote contact and cooperation with candidates for EU membership.

3.1.3. In addition, Member States should do their utmost to integrate and promote transnational mobility in their national policies for the benefit of those people covered by the recommendation. In doing so, it is particularly important for experience gained to date in transnational cooperation in the EU programmes to be turned to good use: there is no sense in continually reinventing the wheel and continually coming up against the same problems.

3.1.4. The ESC feels, however, that the Commission proposal does not adequately reflect the scope of this recommendation. At issue is not only the recognition of experience abroad during education and training, but also quite basic matters concerning, for example, right of residence, social security schemes, labour law, social security law, and tax law. The many problems of detail, the varying circumstances and the fact that the EU does not have overall responsibility, in tax policy for example, means that there can be no short-term piecemeal solutions for removing existing obstacles to mobility. Only recently did the ESC look at precisely this issue of modernising social protection; it set out its stance in an opinion on this subject.

3.1.5. The present draft recommendation addresses a broad range of people, which is essentially to be welcomed. However, it should be borne in mind that within the individual categories of people referred to, there are considerable differences which really need to be approached in different ways. It is therefore a pity that no tailor-made proposals have been made for each target group, going into these issues in greater depth. This mishmash of different specific problems means that the proposed recommendation is very abstract. In this respect, the ESC fears that the recommendation can scarcely have any effect in the short-term, since the obstacles to mobility it aims to deal with have too many different causes. The fact that the research sector has not been covered at all is deplored by the ESC. It calls on the Commission to present a similar proposal in the near future for research in Europe, particularly since mobility in this sector is already much further advanced and benefit should be gained from experience in this area.

3.1.6. The ESC would be pleased if the recommendation, in the medium term, led to a situation where the subject of student mobility was gradually taken up in all the relevant European policy areas (mobility mainstreaming); this would be a major step towards a European education area.

## 3.2. *Specific comments*

### 3.2.1. General recommendations

3.2.1.1. The ESC particularly supports the recommendation that Member States take all appropriate measures to encourage the mobility of people who wish to undertake a course of studies, a period of training, a voluntary activity or provide

teaching or training in another Member State, regardless of whether this is in the context of the Community programme or not.

3.2.1.2. The obstacles which these people come up against are not always financial in nature. In addition to administrative obstacles, there are often language and cultural barriers which prevent people from travelling beyond the borders of their own country. The ESC therefore advocates stepping up the promotion of foreign language teaching. This must be extended both at school — and here it would be sensible to include primary schools and kindergartens — and in vocational training. The European Year of Languages planned for the year 2001 provides an excellent opportunity for promoting pilot projects in this area. The promotion of intercultural skills is also a key factor in promoting mobility: the more people learn about other cultures, the greater their interest in getting to know them. Specific support should be given to mobility in innovative sectors; this could lead to healthy competition between systems and in the long term, could open up a whole range of European educational and training opportunities for the individual.

3.2.1.3. The ease with which knowledge and qualifications obtained abroad can be used in one's home country is a key factor. In order to ensure that genuine additional qualifications can be obtained in the course of a stay abroad which will pay off in the course of a person's career, it is important to promote transparency between the different educational systems in the EU. To this end, the High Level Panel on free movement of persons (chaired by Mrs Veil) proposed the setting up of a forum or observatory to learn from national expertise with a view to monitoring changes in qualifications and diplomas facilitating the dissemination of information and preparing standards promoting transparency and mutual recognition. For higher education, considerable progress has already been made; for vocational training, a major step forward has been achieved with the introduction of the 'Europass-Training' scheme. The ESC calls for implementation of the findings and proposals currently being developed by the Commission, Cedefop and national education experts in the European Forum on the transparency of professional qualifications. For future progress, transparency and cohesion are needed, together with respect for national and professional diversities. Indeed the scale of progress towards transparency of the different education and training systems will dictate the speed of progress, where it is possible, towards recognition of diplomas and other qualifications. Achievement of this final stage would remove a significant obstacle to the free movement of EU citizens.

3.2.1.4. The call on Member States to take appropriate measures so that persons targeted by this recommendation can benefit from all the advantages given to nationals of the host country undertaking the same activity is fundamentally justified. However, this needs to be worded more clearly. On no account should it be interpreted to imply a general commitment on the part of the Member States to provide special social benefits. This concerns in particular such assistance as housing benefit which in most Member States is

awarded only to a small number of applicants after an in-depth examination of their financial situation. The recommendation probably refers to reductions given to students and trainees in view of their particular status; proof thereof is usually provided by a student or pupil ID card. The ESC proposes that a uniform, pan-European EU school or student ID card be introduced to this end, which any student or trainee working abroad in Europe can apply for. This would be an effective, transparent instrument not involving any bureaucratic expense.

3.2.1.5. Steps to encourage the involvement of third country nationals with permanent residence in the EU in exchanges under European Community programmes is a key element in securing equal opportunities to citizens in the EU. Citizens of third countries who are legally resident in an EU country are usually subject to additional difficulties which add to existing obstacles to mobility. Consequently the ESC supports measures to promote the integration of these citizens, particularly against the background of the fight against racism and xenophobia in the EU.

3.2.1.6. It is a moot point as to how realistic it is at the moment to adopt more far reaching measures in the Member States to enable third country nationals to obtain full equality of treatment with regard to the *acquis communautaire* on freedom of movement. In many cases this will clash with existing national rules on citizens from third countries.

### 3.2.2. Measures which specifically concern students

3.2.2.1. The ESC welcomes the fact that the recommendation makes reference to the existing European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and advocates its widespread use. This is indeed a system which operates extremely well and which is suited to securing the transparency of curricula. Recognition of academic experience is guaranteed by means of a contract drawn up in advance between the student and the home and host establishments.

3.2.2.2. In any case the ESC believes that it should be made clear that the enforceability called for here can only be confined to compliance with a contract concluded between a student and his/her educational establishment. It should not be possible to interpret it in such a way that the participation of an educational establishment in the ECTS is axiomatic and can be enforced in law, for that would endanger the continued existence of this smoothly functioning, voluntary system.

3.2.2.3. The ESC feels that two aspects should be taken into account as regards the transfer and payment of grants: on the one hand banks must guarantee that grants are transferred and paid out on time. Particularly in the Erasmus Programme, national coordination bodies constantly reported cases of students having to take out overdrafts because of accounting problems. Such obstacles to mobility are quite simply to be avoided, and the ESC calls on the institutions responsible to solve such difficulties in a non-bureaucratic manner and in the interests of the students. In this connection the ESC would

draw attention to another requirement: students ought to have the option of using the grants which have been allocated in their home country for studies abroad (as long as this grant has not been awarded for studying at a specific college/university or for any other specific purpose). If there are better education options for studying a specific subject in another Member State rather than at home, then students on a grant should have the same opportunities in their search for the best possible course as students who finance their studies themselves.

### 3.2.3. Measures which specifically concern persons undergoing training

3.2.3.1. The ESC is strongly in favour of widespread use of the Europass training document to promote European pathways in work-linked training, including apprenticeship. This Europass applies not only to completed training but also covers further education measures and individual training pathways undertaken abroad. The ESC welcomes the fact that, with Europass, vocational training now also has an instrument with which persons undergoing training can prove their transnational qualifications. Member States are called upon to ensure that this document is also used widely. Students undergoing practical training related to their studies in another European country should also be able to use the Europass.

3.2.3.2. In this connection the ESC welcomes the current Commission initiative to draw up — jointly with vocational training bodies and within the framework of a 'European forum on the transparency of professional qualifications' — proposals for improving mutual understanding of the diverse qualification systems in Europe. The ESC particularly calls on Member States to take these proposals into account as far as possible at national level.

3.2.3.3. The ESC supports the proposal that unemployed people attending training in another Member State should continue to receive the unemployment benefit which they were receiving in their home country, with account being taken of the rules applying in each individual Member State. The employment services in the Member States should more actively support unemployed people who are able and willing to take part in training or further education courses abroad for a fixed period of time. If the employment authorities are to positively assess cross border training schemes, such schemes must be subject to the same conditions, including the maintenance of unemployment benefits, as national training schemes; this is necessary in order to preserve their quality and to avoid abuse. An option of this kind for training abroad should be seen as a factor for promoting integration into the labour market and it could indeed open up new prospects for this group of people, which they might not have had in their home country. This might also enable them to learn a foreign language, which would be an important additional qualification.

3.2.3.4. The ESC particularly welcomes the call for people who go abroad in Europe for training purposes to be given the same residence status as students. This will enhance the status of vocational training and ensure that it receives due respect throughout Europe. If it is the intention to work towards equality of treatment with students, then steps should be taken to ensure that, just as students have to be registered at a university, people undergoing training have to be linked to an institution. Even if only to prevent abuse of such a rule, the ESC deems it absolutely necessary to clarify this point.

### 3.2.4. Measures which specifically concern young volunteers

3.2.4.1. The ESC supports the Commission's programme for young volunteers. It can make a major contribution to intercultural understanding. Young people who are still in their formative years are thus offered the opportunity to acquire 'European skills' as part of a non-profitmaking activity in another European country — skills which may be of benefit to them in their future career. Apart from learning a foreign language, these include key skills, such as how to cope with a foreign culture, the strengthening of trainee's social skills and the widening of their personal horizons. Experiences with the Commission programme to date indicate that almost all participants found their overseas experiences extremely enriching for their further training and careers.

3.2.4.2. In order to open this programme up to a wider range of participants, volunteers must however, in addition to an appropriate allowance which at least covers living costs, also be provided with adequate social welfare and sickness insurance cover, not only during their stay abroad, but also when they return to their country of origin.

### 3.2.5. Measures which specifically concern teachers and trainers

3.2.5.1. The ESC welcomes the fact that teachers and trainers have been explicitly included in the recommendation. Periods spent abroad in further education or teaching not only have a positive impact on a person's qualifications, but are

beneficial for teaching itself. The recommendations to Member States as to how to structure academic calendars and the call to introduce European sabbatical periods are essentially worthy of consideration.

3.2.5.2. The ESC, however, strongly underlines that the European Commission can here provide food for thought, but in the end it must always be left up to the individual educational institutions as to how they handle these suggestions and how they work out their academic calendars in line with their needs. The proposal on European sabbatical periods should be implemented in a flexible way, taking into account the needs of individuals and of educational establishments.

3.2.5.3. Moreover, the call to reward mobile teachers by means of career promotion is over simplified and one-sided. It is indeed the case that in many cases periods spent teaching abroad can even have a negative effect on a person's career; steps should of course be taken to counteract this. However, mobility is not an end in itself, nor a factor to be considered in isolation; it can be one positive criterion in career development. Here the ESC would advocate taking more appropriate account of a person's willingness to be more mobile in their job.

### 3.2.6. Reporting obligation

3.2.6.1. In this process a strong commitment of European, national, regional and local institutions will be required. An involvement of the social partners will improve the possibilities of making real progress. The group of experts should include representatives of the social partners at the European level. Steps to eliminate obstacles to mobility constitute a long-term process and their success will not necessarily be measurable by a rapid succession of reports from Member States and the Commission. The ESC therefore proposes that consideration be given to mandatory reports only every three years. The Commission's report should be based on the contributions from the Member States and evaluate the achievements in the area of freedom of movement. This evaluation should, as appropriate, serve as a point of departure for new proposals from the Commission in order to encourage Member States to continue their efforts towards the elimination of all obstacles to mobility.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

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

**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European cooperation in quality evaluation in school education'**

(2000/C 168/09)

On 29 February 2000, the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 11 April 2000. The rapporteur was Mr Rupp.

At its 372nd plenary session (meeting of 27 April 2000) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 108 votes to one with four abstentions.

## 1. Introduction

1.1. The European pilot project on quality evaluation in school education was launched at the start of the 1997 school year and formally ended with a final conference in Vienna in November 1998.

101 secondary schools in 18 countries took part in the project (the EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein).

The number of schools selected in each country was roughly in proportion to country size. Large countries each had nine schools in the project, medium-sized countries five and small countries two. The schools were selected by a national committee.

The European Commission (education, training and youth) has submitted a report in several parts on the implementation of the project entitled:

Quality evaluation in school education:

- Guide for the participating schools
- Practical guide to self-evaluation
- Interim report
- Final report.

1.1.1. In particular, the final report

- presents the project;
- describes the approaches adopted by the schools;
- evaluates the work of the schools;
- outlines monitoring at national level;
- considers the conditions of success of the pilot project;
- and sets out the prospects for the participating schools.

## 2. General comments

### 2.1. *The importance of high standards in education*

There is no doubt that quality of education is a key indicator both of the maturity and independence of each individual member of society, and of the social and economic effectiveness of that society itself.

Since the emergence of the modern state, the quality of education and cognitive and social skills (both individually and as a whole) have been the mainstay of a country's social fabric, prosperity and democracy.

'Knowledge itself is power!' — this tenet of performance-based civil society organisations and associations is more true now than ever before, although it should be noted that, in this context, education does not mean accumulating knowledge, but channelling knowledge to practical use.

### 2.1.1. Education and globalisation

The development of society and individual liberties makes it essential to ensure high standards of education to match the dynamic changes in industry, the job market, science, research and technology, politics and government administration. The aim must thereby be to promote and secure employability and to launch the process of lifelong learning. This is not only a matter for public education systems, but must also involve the family, non-school education providers and industry. However, the fact that the state is responsible for education makes it primarily a task for schools.

As globalisation advances apace, this can no longer hold good only for individual countries, but requires joint and above all coordinated action to ensure high standards of education and thus make major strides in fostering people's cross-border mobility and in the transfer of education.



### 2.1.2. A set of European educational norms

Assessing education and monitoring standards involves probing the content, scope, objectives and norms of education itself. In the final analysis — and with all due respect for national and cultural characteristics and individual countries' sovereignty — the EU too must seek to establish a set of European educational norms, along the lines of a European core curriculum, which provides the same guaranteed standards and level of quality assessment in all countries.

A common core curriculum underpinned by the highest possible educational standards not only creates an environment conducive to mobility and prosperity, but also ensures comparability of performance and thus equality of opportunity for individual citizens. Thus, it is set to become a cornerstone of democracy and the welfare state in Europe.

### 2.1.3. Performance-led quality

The quality of education relates to performance and thus performance review and performance control. Quality has to be measured against yardsticks and standards which have developed culturally and are laid down in curricula. For schools, quality assessment is nothing new; on the contrary, learning processes — and hence educational results — have continually been subject to performance review.

The novelty is, first of all, that educational standards — and the assessment thereof — are to be underpinned internationally across different school systems, thus making it possible to compare quality on a broad scale. Secondly, this is to take place against the backdrop of enhanced autonomy for individual schools, in other words in a decentralised educational environment.

### 2.1.4. Decentralising the way schools are run

External and internal evaluation are useful tools on this front. In addition, a new balance is being established between central control and decision-making powers decentralised downstream — ultimately to schools themselves. Benchmarks hold this system together. They are designed to secure comparable and — depending on the level of schooling — uniform standards in the quality of school education and thus the qualifications awarded by schools.

In this process, schools need lasting support. Various compensatory measures are required to enable schools to join a quality assurance scheme of this kind. Such support must be provided within the education sector and also — above all — through government budgetary policy. Adequate resources remain essential to high standards in education. The European Parliament and the Council should therefore press home this fact to the Member States.

### 2.1.5. Acceptability by those concerned

The success of any action to evaluate the quality of school education and training depends on the backing for such action by those concerned. In this context, that does not mean those responsible for schools at a political level (who make frequent reference to individual countries' cultural and thus educational independence), but rather those actually involved in teaching and learning — together with their organisations and trade unions — as well as families and local communities in schools' catchment areas. All of them need the requisite environment and broader scope for action in order to achieve and assess high standards of education.

Schemes designed to secure high standards and quality assessment in education will founder if they seek — solely on the basis of economic efficiency and without increasing resources — to boost performance while at the same time forcing individual schools to deal with the shortfall through structural changes under the banner of decentralisation. Educational establishments such as schools are not comparable with businesses any more than learning is comparable with industrial production processes.

High standards of European education are without doubt a key element in the future viability of the Community; as the explanatory memorandum to the recommendations rightly states, safeguarding these standards is a priority.

Hence, the recommendation is to be supported — both in principle and on most points of detail. Since the principle of voluntary cooperation and adaptation applies, it remains up to individual countries to decide whether they have the will to give their young people equality of opportunity across Europe and whether they are prepared to make the requisite financial resources available for that purpose. This is essential to secure Europe's position in the world.

## 2.2. Background to the current proposal for a recommendation

2.2.1. Securing high standards of education in schools is deemed to be a priority — hence the need to up the importance of education policy within the EU as a whole. We would endorse this view. The recommendation currently on the table could further that objective.

It is of course every teacher's priority to ensure high standards of instruction; however, the requisite resources must also be made available (see above).

The European pilot project on quality evaluation in school education can be regarded as a success. A key element in that success is the fact that the pilot project also put forward practical proposals for evaluation. It is thus a workable base on which to build a wider quality assurance scheme.

2.2.2. The European contribution to educational standards in the Community is compensatory in nature; it aims to support and supplement national education systems in specific ways so as to promote the development of a Europe-wide educational standard. That does not mean harmonising education, but rather fostering equal educational opportunities in the Community.

As the draft paper too points out, educational standards are not thereby set from the 'top down'. Rather, educational quality is a dynamic variable of social development which is influenced by other policy areas. This applies particularly to financing.

High standards of education cannot therefore be secured without adequate resources. On the contrary, lack of resources overburdens the players involved and the system itself; particularly in the light of increasing decentralisation, this undermines the acceptability of quality assessment schemes.

2.2.3. With regard to the school system, it should be noted that decentralisation and more direct responsibility offer a crucial educational opportunity to raise standards and boost efficiency.

This holds good provided the principle is applied that, by introducing more scope for decentralised, independent action, educational and school-related decisions are taken at the level at which they are to be implemented. In a democratic state, parliament naturally retains the right to scrutinise key decisions affecting the system as a whole. However, decentralisation is only beneficial where it does not result in the lower levels of the education system being compelled to manage shortcomings which they themselves are not in a position to resolve. This applies in particular to the provision of instruction, school equipment and the availability of teaching staff.

2.2.4. External and internal evaluation are the main tools of quality assessment. Of the two, priority must be given to internal evaluation, not least for reasons of decentralisation but also in line with the principle of democracy. This order of priorities does not detract from the value of external evaluation. However, any relevant EU scheme should focus on internal evaluation.

This means giving individual schools practical tools to assess and raise educational standards themselves. To this end, various incentives should be worked out in cooperation with the Member States in order to make the schemes acceptable enough so that all the relevant players are involved.

2.2.5. Compiling and keeping archive records of quality indicators and benchmarks can provide important support for the quality assessment of individual schools, since these provide a touchstone for comparison and an overview to back up internal evaluation. The establishment of an appropriate database, which is accessible to schools (educational servers),

must therefore be an integral part of the European educational quality assurance scheme.

### 3. Specific comments

#### 3.1. *Basic points concerning the explanatory memorandum to the recommendation*

3.1.1. More resources have indeed been devoted to education in the countries concerned. In terms of the status of education, however, the absolute level of resources fails to give the full picture. Education spending must be considered in relation to gross domestic product. An improvement on this front alone indicates a genuine rise in education resources.

There is a direct link between education and employment. Better education also boosts people's chances of finding a job. However, education does not lead directly to employment. It can undoubtedly go a considerable way towards helping resolve difficulties in employment and social policy, but it is not in itself the solution. The capacity of education to resolve the problems of society as a whole must not be overrated.

Specific mention should be made here of the concept of 'lifelong learning': one period of training is no longer enough to cover people's entire working lives; ongoing and further training is required and the proper conditions need to be established for this.

3.1.2. Any action to secure high standards in education must provide specific, targeted support for (i) children and young people suffering from or at risk of disability and from disadvantaged social backgrounds and (ii) school drop-outs. It must be remembered here that, over the past few years, school drop-out rates have proved extremely resistant to a variety of educational support schemes. More action is needed — particularly additional measures at all levels of social policy — to help those concerned gain an adequate education and/or leave school with a qualification.

Given the growth in information technologies and current communications standards in industry, connecting schools to the Internet and providing (economic) support to facilitate pupil access are actually essential elements in boosting standards of education and fostering educational interchange.

3.1.3. It is emphatically underlined that raising educational standards means not only maximising knowledge, but also expanding social and emotional skills.

3.1.4. Any action taken under this recommendation can build on the successful 1997/1998 pilot project on quality evaluation in school education.

### 3.2. *Basic points concerning the individual recommendations*

3.2.1. Educational standards in schools must be maintained through transparent quality schemes and developed into a set of European educational norms. The aim is not only to provide training and vocational qualifications, but above all to improve people's way of life in terms of democratic involvement in civil society organisations and associations.

3.2.2. The number of schools able to learn from internal evaluation must be increased by a focused scheme comprising a variety of incentives designed to ensure that as 'good' schools carry on getting better, 'bad' schools do not carry on getting worse. Incentives for teachers, for instance, must include opportunities for promotion, advancement and further training. In turn, teachers must also offer their students incentives to perform well.

3.2.3. External evaluation must be carried out by specialised bodies using yardsticks which apply specifically to schools. A simple input-output method based on economic efficiency is inappropriate to quality control. The EU's educational indi-

cators are a key foundation and reference framework for evaluation. The same is also true of point 2 (b) of the proposal for a European Parliament and Council recommendation.

3.2.4. In the drive for success, it is essential to actively involve all players concerned; they must have an input at every stage of the assessment process.

3.2.5. Training courses on the methodology and application of self-evaluation of educational practice in schools should also include the mutual exchange of teachers and instructors who have a proven track record in this field. Such courses may be used both in initial teacher training and in external and in-house further teacher training as well.

3.2.6. Cooperation with the appropriate authorities must continually refer back to educational practice in schools and the teaching staff involved 'on the ground' in quality assurance.

3.2.7. In addition to the appropriate authorities, advances in expertise in this field in Europe must be made available to schools without delay, for example as part of the planned database.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

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

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## Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Follow-up of the World Summit of Social Development'

(2000/C 168/10)

In accordance with Rule of Procedure 23(3), the European Economic and Social Committee decided at its Plenary Session on 29 April 1999 to adopt an opinion on the above-mentioned subject.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the work, adopted its opinion on 14 April 2000. The rapporteur was Mr Etty.

At its 372nd plenary session on 27 April 2000, the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 107 votes in favour, one vote against and six abstentions.

### 1. Introduction

1.1. From 26-30 June 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations will, in a Special Session in Geneva, assess the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen (1995) and discuss further activities.

1.2. The 'Social Summit' of 1995 in Copenhagen discussed three main issues:

- the eradication of poverty
- the promotion of social integration, and
- the promotion of full employment.

1.3. The result of the Summit was a Declaration on Social Development and a Progress of Action to implement it. The core of this were ten commitments made by the Member States, a large majority of whom represented by their Heads of State and/or Government. These commitments were:

Commitment 1: We commit ourselves to creating an economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development.

Commitment 2: We commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international co-operation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.

Commitment 3: We commit ourselves to promoting the goal of full employment as a basic priority of our economic and social policies, and to enabling all men and women to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods through freely chosen productive employment and work.

Commitment 4: We commit ourselves to promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all

human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.

Commitment 5: We commit ourselves to promoting full respect for human dignity and to achieving equality and equity between women and men, and to recognising and enhancing the participation and leadership roles of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and in development.

Commitment 6: We commit ourselves to promoting and attaining the goals of universal and equitable access to quality education, the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the access of all to primary health care, making particular efforts to rectify inequalities relating to social conditions and without distinction as to race, national origin, gender, age or disability; respecting and promoting our common and particular cultures; striving to strengthen the role of culture in development; preserving the essential bases of people-centred sustainable development; and contributing to the full development of human resources and to social development. The purpose of these activities is to eradicate poverty, promote full and productive employment and foster social integration.

Commitment 7: We commit ourselves to accelerating the economic, social and human resource development of Africa and the least developed countries.

Commitment 8: We commit ourselves to ensuring that when structural adjustment programmes are agreed to they include social development goals, in particular eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment, and enhancing social integration.

Commitment 9: We commit ourselves to increasing significantly and/or utilising more efficiently the resources allocated to social development in order to achieve the goals of the Summit through national action and regional and international co-operation.

Commitment 10: We commit ourselves to an improved and strengthened framework for international, regional and subregional co-operation for social development, in a spirit of partnership, through the United Nations and other multilateral institutions.

1.4. Preparations for the Special Session on the follow-up of the Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action started in September 1997 with the establishment of a Preparatory Committee.

Member States of the UN have, in the course of 1999, sent in reports on the effect they have given to the commitments. These reports have been discussed and assessed in a meeting of the Commission on Social Development of the Economic and Social Council of the UN in February of this year.

1.5. As regards regional preparations, for reasons not totally clear, Europe has been omitted by the UN. The logical UN body to do this is the ECE (which is for instance in charge of the regional preparation of the follow-up of the 1995 Beijing Women's Summit). The Council of Europe has stepped in and organised a preparatory 'European Conference on Social Development' in Dublin on January 18-19 next, which discussed reports of the Member States of the Council and did more in-depth work on the commitments 1, 2 and 4 in working parties.

## 2. The EU and the Social Summit

2.1. Implementation of the ten Copenhagen commitments is, of course, primarily a matter for the individual EU Member States. It is important to stress that in the context of this Opinion. However, the EU has taken a strong interest on the Copenhagen Summit in 1994 and 1995. The European Community produced a Communication on the Summit and had extensive consultations with civil society (including the Economic and Social Committee and the economic and social interest groups represented on it). A large EC delegation participated in the 'Social Summit', of which the Committee was part.

2.2. The European Community has not submitted a report on implementation to the UN-Secretariat. The Commission's Communication on the European Community's follow-up to the World Summit on Social Development of 1996 is, obviously, not a suitable basis for an assessment at this point of time. The Committee realises that the Commission was not obliged to report. However, taking into account Commitment 10, it thinks that the Commission has missed a chance to show the international community how cooperation between

the Member States has produced an added value to the respective national policies regarding poverty, social integration and employment. This is in particular so as regards the latter.

2.3. The EU Presidency has, in the past few years, expressed itself on a number of occasions on the implementation of the outcome of the 'Social Summit', lastly during the 54th Session of the General Assembly of the UN.

## 3. General remarks

3.1. In its February 1995 Opinion on the Copenhagen Summit, the Committee has made a number of observations and recommendations which still seem to be relevant. They include:

- an initiative to be taken by the EU to take the lead in a campaign for wider ratification and full application of ILO Convention No 144 on Tripartite Consultation (now, in 2000, the EU could focus on its candidate Member States, its partners in the Barcelona process in the Mercosur and the ACP countries for this campaign);
- measures to promote social development through international trade (the Committee has given an elaboration of these early proposals in its 1999 Opinion on the WTO and in recent Opinions on EU trade policy);
- measures to combat child labour (in 1999, the ILO has adopted a new Convention on the worst forms of child labour. The EU could make an important gesture to the international community if all 15 Member States would quickly ratify this new Convention. Also, the two Member States which have not yet ratified ILO Convention No 138 on Minimum Age (Austria and the UK) should make an effort to do so in the very near future. Furthermore, at this point of time, the Committee wishes to encourage the EU and all its Member States to support financially the ILO programs to help eradicate child labour);
- encouraging Member States to use their influence in the IMF, the World Bank, the OECD and regional development banks to convince these institutions of the urgent need to work more closely together with the ILO (at this point of time, we would add the WTO to this list, and also urge the EU to make a joint effort to help democratise these organisations and increase their transparency);
- strengthening the coherence of the EU's external, security, trade, agriculture and development policies (here, the Committee would add, five years after Copenhagen, that this increased coherence must be used in particular in the fight against poverty in the world, and for the prevention of armed conflicts);

— making a clearly focused contribution to the follow-up process by selecting for coordinated EU-wide actions: a limited number of initiatives in the field of employment creation, the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

3.2. Although implementation, as earlier stated, is the prime responsibility of Member States, concerted EU action can have considerable added value. The Committee expressed that belief already in 1995 in the final recommendation of its Opinion (para. 13.2). In the 1995 Opinion, when addressing regional co-operation, the Committee concentrated on co-operation in the EU. The enlargement process, the development of Euromediterranean co-operation, and the growth of the relationship with the ACP countries strongly suggest that one should assess, in a realistic way, further geographical areas where an EU input could make a significant difference for the chances of success of the 'Copenhagen process'.

3.3. If one looks at the relevant areas of social policy where the EU has made significant progress which might also be relevant to other groups of countries, taking into account the limited resources available and the agenda of the UN where the fight against poverty will figure prominently this year, then employment policy and the way it has been developed springs to mind. That does not mean, of course, that the EU and its Member States should not make an effort to increase their development cooperation efforts and to alleviate the debt burden of the poorest development countries. It means that it is in particular in the field of employment policy that the EU can, through regional cooperation, make a particularly valuable contribution to the efforts of certain partners.

3.4. The ILO, which has been given the first responsibility for the promotion of full employment (Commitment 3) in the Copenhagen process by the UN, has done important work in the past five years. It has reached the conclusion that, while in a few industrialised and newly industrialising countries progress with regard to job creation and reduction of unemployment and underemployment has been registered, the employment situation and progress in alleviating poverty in many parts of the world, particularly among developing countries and countries in transition, remained unsatisfactory and in some countries had even worsened<sup>(1)</sup>. The ILO has called for renewed efforts in job creation, improvement of the quality of jobs, training and gender equality in the workplace. It maintains that an important element in this is the ratification and implementation of the ILO core conventions and the follow-up of the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. It has called for a new employment strategy with global and national dimensions.

For the success of this, co-ordinated actions of the ILO and other UN agencies, and in particular with the Bretton Woods institutions, OECD and regional organisations is vital, according to the ILO. In this context, the Committee also notes that recent events have demonstrated an urgent need for reform of UN institutions, in particular with respect to their democratic character and the transparency of their policy-making and implementation. Criticism on and resistance against, in particular, IMF, World Bank and WTO have clearly been motivated by the view that these institutions do not pay enough attention to the negative impact of the globalisation of the world economy.

#### 4. Specific remarks

4.1. In 1995 already, the Committee wanted the ILO to play a prominent role in the implementation of the result of the Social Summit. It thinks that, indeed, the active promotion of the 1998 ILO Declaration can be most conducive for an effective worldwide employment promotion strategy. It strongly recommends that the EU commits itself to this, politically as well as financially. EU involvement must also include an effort to secure ratification by all the Member States of the fundamental human rights Conventions of the ILO. In addition to the gaps in EU Member States' ratification of the Minimum Age Convention (No 138), mentioned in para 3.1, the Committee once more recalls the fact that the ILO's Convention against Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (No 111) has still not been ratified by Luxembourg.

4.2. The Committee is concerned that, more and more, economic policy tends to escape from political control. Therefore, the EU and its Member States must press for clear social policy guidelines for IMF and World Bank policies, based on the Copenhagen commitments, including the importance the latter attach to ILO core labour standards. They must also continue their efforts to establish a standing working forum on fundamental labour standards in multilateral trade agreements between the ILO and the WTO. The Committee welcomes — in particular with a view to the developments at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle — all steps which could lead to greater understanding (and, by consequence, also to concrete measures) promoting fundamental labour standards.

Multinational companies, in their activities in developing and in transition countries, must respect the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Companies and the ILO's Tripartite Declaration on Multinational Companies and Social Policy. The Committee hopes that the review of the OECD Guidelines, currently underway will result in the inclusion of references to all the ILO 'core labour standards' (i.e. freedom of association, collective bargaining, forced labour, discrimination in labour and occupation and child labour).

<sup>(1)</sup> See 1999 UN's 'Human Development Report' and 'Poverty Report'.

4.3. As regards the Candidate Member States in Central and Eastern Europe, the Committee recommends EU-support for the development of an employment strategy along the lines of the 'Luxembourg process' by them. This will at the same time help the Governments of these countries to find sustainable solutions for the employment problems in their countries, and help to introduce a major element of the European Social model in the region.

4.4. In its relationship with the neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean area, the EU should encourage partner Governments to involve employers' organisations, trade unions and other relevant socio-economic interest groups stronger than before in their employment policies, wherever possible in a regional context. Further development of elements in the social dimension of the Barcelona co-operation (vocational training, social dialogue) should be included.

4.5. The Committee thinks that in the ACP countries, and in particular those in Sub-Sahara Africa (see Commitment 7), the EU should continue the efforts it has made in the past few years to help create Economic and Social Councils, which potentially are important instruments for socio-economic interest groups to influence and help to implement employment policies of their Governments.

4.6. In developing the initiatives referred to in para 3.1, last indent, above, the Committee wants the Commission to target in particular the poorest and socially most excluded groups within the EU.

4.7. The Secretary General of the UN has called for coherence in the follow-up of the various 'People's Summits'

of the 1990s. Taking that into account, and also referring to the Opinion on the follow-up of the 'Beijing Women's Summit', it is submitting simultaneously with the present one, the Committee recalls that 'feminisation of poverty' has been a major point of concern at the 1995 Beijing Conference. The Committee refers to paras 3.3 and 3.4 above and wishes to underscore in this context the importance of the gender component in the areas for action, identified by the ILO. The same holds for the proposals for EU-support for the candidate Member States in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Mediterranean, and in Sub-Sahara Africa in paras 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5.

4.8. The social and economic interest groups represented on the Committee have a special role to play in social development. It is surprising that the UN have given NGOs a special role in the preparation of the follow-up of the 'Social Summit' of 1995, but apparently does not think it important to give a special place to employers federations, trade unions, consumers, farmers organisations, welfare organisations, etc. In particular, the role of employers organisations and trade unions has been a controversial issue between a large number of developing countries and industrialised countries. The Committee is deeply concerned about this. The European Commission must address this point and clarify in the Geneva Special Session of the General Assembly that these organisations, with their strongly representative character, are very particular NGOs if it comes to social development and that they not only express the views of their members but often participate in national policy-making and implementation. The European Commission must also stimulate that socio-economic interest groups be represented on national delegations of Member States to the Special Session in Geneva. Also, the Committee urges the Commission to invite it, like in 1995, to be represented in its delegation.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

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

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## APPENDIX I

**to the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee****Preliminary assessment of implementation**

The UN Secretariat has received reports from a large majority of the Member States (among whom all 15 Member States of the EU), the Regional Commissions of the UN (with the exception of the ECE), the UN funds and programs, the specialised agencies including the Bretton Woods institutions, other intergovernmental institutions such as the regional development banks, and the OECD.

Although reports contain positive elements, it is clear that in many respects only limited progress has been made with regard to the three main themes of 'Copenhagen'. According to the UN Secretariat, several targets specified in the Program of Action will not be met within the period agreed, and in some cases there have been serious setbacks. The severe economic difficulties several countries experienced in the past few years as a result of the financial crisis and related developments have been a major cause. There is also a concern that the recent emphasis on financial and economic policies has often not been development oriented, and that the dominance of a limited set of macroeconomic targets and parameters over the social, political, cultural and environmental aspects has been detrimental.

Progress areas include, according to the UN Secretariat:

- Greater awareness of and commitment to social development as an overriding goal of government policy and a basis for mobilisation of civil society,
- Progress towards poverty eradication, albeit uneven, slow and erratic,
- Renewed hope that full employment is an achievable goal, although progress has been timid and threatened by often hidden underemployment, widening informalisation and lack of social protection,
- Continued progress in literacy, declining infant mortality and life expectancy, school enrolment and access to basic social services, despite local and at times severe setbacks; and
- Equality and equity between men and women has moved closer to reality in major regions of the world, despite the persistent tendency for women to be the first losers in times of crisis and restructuring,
- A majority of governments have put their money where their mouth is and increased allocation of domestic resources for social development in relative, and often in absolute, terms.

'Regression areas', as identified by the same sources, include:

- Local and region conflicts have caused setbacks in social integration in a growing number of regions of the world,
- The world overall has become a more unequal place, with increasing inequalities in income, in employment, in access to social services and to opportunities for participation in public and civil society institutions,
- Contrary to the commitment made at Copenhagen to strengthen co-operation for social development through the UN, resources allocated for social development in the framework of international co-operation have declined, although there is a renewed commitment of the international community for debt reduction for the poorest countries,
- The burden of debt has grown markedly since Copenhagen, further squeezing resources available for social development,
- With liberalisation of capital flows, the world has become more vulnerable to sudden financial shocks with severe social consequences where the real victims of such shocks are increasingly powerless to rectify their social situation.



The Secretariat had in November 1999 identified the following eleven cross-cutting issues in the reports received, which they wanted to analyse further for an evaluation of progress/regression and for extracting ideas for further initiatives:

1. Inequality: In the face of growing inequality within and between nations, how can the fruits of development be more equitably distributed within and amongst nations? Is inequality the price to pay for economic growth, or is inequality an impediment to growth?
  2. Financing of social services: Increasingly social services are being targeted towards the most vulnerable groups of society. However, targeting and means-testing of benefits can lead in some cases to a break-up in social solidarity which in turn provokes a decline in quality of and resources for those services. How can solidarity and sustainability be reconciled with the need for greater efficiency and selectivity in providing social services?
  3. Urbanisation: While the majority of the poor still live in rural areas, the world and especially developing countries, is rapidly being transformed into an urban planet. In the face of this transformation, how can scarce resources best be allocated between rural and urban areas? How can social development best take into account the specific needs of each sector of society?
  4. The working poor: Although in many areas of the world unemployment has decreased all too often the new jobs are of low quality, associated with low wages and little social protection. Increasingly, employment is not sufficient to bring populations out of poverty. How have countries addressed the growing phenomena of the 'working poor' and what can be done to improve wages at the low end of the labour market?
  5. Informalisation of employment: In many developing countries, formal sector employment represents a small and declining share of the labour market. Furthermore the informal sector is no longer a monopoly of developing countries, and all over the world, the informal sector is growing in a symbiotic relationship with the formal sector. What can be done to improve revenues and social protection in the informal sector, and this without undercutting the ability of the formal sector to create jobs?
  6. Rehabilitating the public sector: The process of economic reforms has in many cases weakened the capacity of the state to promote social development. One of the lessons learned from recent financial crises, is that liberalisation and privatisation should not take place at the expense of an appropriate regulatory framework. A strong, transparent public sector is required to oversee the process of economic reform, and to create an enabling environment for social development.
  7. Decentralisation: There has been a clear trend towards decentralisation and devolution of responsibilities to local government. Decentralisation is often conducive to greater participation and accountability, but not necessarily conducive to equitable distribution of resources across regions and populations groups. How can these conflicting concerns best be reconciled?
  8. Declining ODA: Whereas certain countries have increased allocations of ODA, this has taken place in the face of an overall trend of decline, this despite the pledges made at Copenhagen. What strategies can be adopted to reverse this trend?
  9. Crisis intervention: Furthermore, scarce development resources are being allocated to an increasing number of crisis interventions which are much more costly, in both human and in financial terms, than crisis prevention and longer-term promotion of human development. Increasing wars, local conflicts and natural disasters have had a negative impact on social development.
  10. Need for effective strategies to implement the commitments of the Social Summit. The gap between commitment and implementation remains a major problem. Still more work is required to develop the strategies, tools and capacity required to successfully implement the Copenhagen commitments.
  11. Debt servicing has become a cumulative burden which is weighing heavily on social development. How can debt relief be most effectively implemented for a positive impact on increasing social expenditure?
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## APPENDIX II

**to the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee****Specific comments of the ESC 1995 Opinion on World Summit for Social Development (CES 4/95) —  
OJ C 110, 2.5.1995)****1. Principles**

1.1. The principles laid down in the Commission's Communication, which it wishes to see reflected in the results of the World Summit for Social Development, are endorsed. The Committee is particularly pleased with the first principle: that respect for human rights and democracy — including dialogue between employers and workers and the participation of civil society — cannot be divorced from social development. It is convinced that these are truly universal fundamental human rights. The Committee hopes that the World Summit will adopt this principle in the explicit terms used by the Commission, and invites those Member States which have not yet done so, to include it in their legislation and in their national and international practices in order to promote real, worldwide social development.

1.2. An important practical instrument for stimulating dialogue between employers and workers and promoting participation of civil society in social development throughout the world is Convention No 144 of 1976 of the ILO on Tripartite Consultation to promote the Implementation of International Labour Standards. It is a pity that this instrument is not mentioned by the Commission. Application of Convention No 144 promotes both democracy and social peace. The Committee thinks that the European Union should, on the basis of its own first principle, take the lead in a campaign for wider ratification and full application of this Convention by ILO Member States. That campaign should start with consultations with a view to ratification of this convention by all Member States of the EU.

**2. Objectives**

2.1. The Committee highlights and supports activities of the European Union aimed at multilateral action which will promote social development through international trade. It agrees that negotiations on this matter must be continued within the World Trade Organization (WTO) and welcomes the EU's general approach in this matter. The EU must make a real effort to make this a priority issue in the WTO. The Committee considers that priority should be given to encouraging countries to ratify the basic ILO human rights Conventions on Freedom of Association and protection of the right to organise (1948) (for workers and employers), on the right to organise Collective Bargaining (1949) and on Forced Labour (1930) and the abolition of Forced Labour (1957). All EU Member States have ratified the Conventions on Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining, and the other human rights Conventions, which have also been ratified by an overwhelming majority of ILO Member States, including a large number of developing countries.

2.2. The Committee regrets that the ILO Convention against Discrimination in Employment and Occupation (1958), which is of exactly the same nature and fundamental importance as the Conventions mentioned earlier and just as widely ratified, is not mentioned by the Commission in this context. This must be an unintended omission. During the meeting of the Third Preparatory Committee of the Social Summit last month in New York, the EU has shown the importance it gives to the principles enshrined in this convention. The Committee therefore strongly recommends that the European Union correct this and include this Anti-Discrimination Convention in the proposed campaign. Logically, this should also be a vehicle for some of the European Union's views and intentions concerning the eradication of poverty and exclusion, laid down for instance in the second Conclusion of the Commission's document (equality between men and women).

2.3. The Committee attaches great importance to raising the status of women through access to income and to education. Education, especially of women and girls, is a key factor in the battle against poverty and overpopulation. Where women are educated, both infant death rates and birth rates fall.

2.4. The substance of the Conventions referred to in points 11.1. and 11.2. underpins the approach to the 'social clause' — already proposed in various ESC Opinions — an approach which obviously has nothing in common with protectionism. On the contrary, widespread application of these principles would boost trade by ensuring that all workers enjoy equal basic rights and consumers have reasonable guarantees that the goods they purchase have not been produced under inhumane working conditions. In this connection, the Committee also draws the attention to the ongoing analytical work of the OECD on this issue, the results of which might provide valuable arguments for further negotiations.

2.5. One effective way to encourage governments to comply and ratify with important ILO Conventions is to give priority when granting aid and trade preferences to countries which implement genuine, effective social development strategies. This could be a worthwhile contribution by the European Union to the increase in the resources assigned to social development which will be necessary, even if the Summit succeeds in using existing resources more efficiently. In this context, the Committee welcomes Council Regulation (EC) No 3281/94 of 19 December last year applying a four year scheme of Generalised Tariff Preferences (1995-1998) in respect of certain industrial products originating in developing countries.

2.6. The Commission's proposals can help to create more humane living and working conditions for child workers. Child labour can gradually be stamped out by the introduction of general measures to improve 'well-being' (working conditions, opportunities for education, etc.).

2.7. Ratification and compliance with ILO Conventions are as much a function of good governance as is the effective development of social policies. The trade and aid policies proposed in the previous paragraph will ensure that existing resources are used more effectively. The developed and developing countries should in parallel introduce measures to reduce corrupt practices in North/South business dealings. These practices are a grave impediment to social and economic progress.

2.8. If the European Union really wishes to include social development in the policies developed by IMF, World Bank and regional development banks, it must actively use its influence in these institutions to convince them that they must cooperate with the ILO much more intensively than in the past, in particular on structural adjustment operations. The EU must take proper account of the impact of structural adjustment programmes on the poor, for example, in health, education and agricultural policy changes.

2.9. The Committee reiterates its view, expressed in earlier Opinions, that it is high time to construct the conditions and the instruments which can stimulate economic growth, trade and distribution of wealth and opportunities at the global level and link this to a process of development which is compatible with social progress and protection of the environment. This requires that the EU commits itself to strengthen coherence between its external, security, trade, agriculture and development policies. The Committee urges the EU to make this commitment at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, given the coincidence in time of this Summit meeting and the establishment of the WTO.

### **3. Means: resources and follow-up**

The Committee wishes to stress the importance of the Commission's intention to help developing countries (and in particular the poorest among them) by measures which stimulate gradual integration of the informal sector into the formal economy. In this connection the Committee stresses the important role NGOs, including farmers' organizations, cooperatives and women's organizations can play in addition to employers' and trade union organizations.

### **4. Conclusions**

4.1. The Committee is pleased with the determination of the European Union, expressed in its Conclusions, to step up its contribution to multilateral negotiations on standards and Conventions. This must be done with a clear division of roles and responsibilities. The Committee refers, in this context, to its Own-initiative Opinion on the Relations between the EU and the International Labour Organization (ILO), adopted last month.

4.2. Finally, the Committee strongly recommends that the European Union, involving workers, employers and other relevant socio-economic interest groups, make a clearly focused contribution to the follow-up process of the Social Summit by selecting for coordinated, EU-wide action, a limited number of initiatives in the fields of employment creation, the fight against poverty, and social integration. Implementation of the Summit decisions will be a matter for individual governments. However, the Summit should, and probably will, stress the significance of regional cooperation in the implementation process. It is important for the success of the Social Summit that a major group of countries, such as those united in the European Union, set an example of such cooperation in their own region. The Commission is invited to work out a proposal on the basis of existing European Union policies on employment, poverty, and social exclusion.

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### **Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women'**

(2000/C 168/11)

On 27 January 2000, the Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 23(3) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an opinion on the above-mentioned subject.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 14 April 2000. The rapporteur was Ms Florio.

At its 372nd plenary session (meeting of 27 April 2000) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion with 116 votes in favour and two abstentions.

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1. The UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing on 4-15 September 1995, adopted a Declaration and Platform for Action, defining objectives and strategies for the development, advancement and equal participation of women.

1.2. Five years after the Fourth Conference, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolutions 52/100 and 52/231, convening a special session on 'Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century', to be held in New York on 5-9 June 2000.

1.3. The purpose of the special session is to assess the progress made in implementing the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing, identify the main obstacles and recommend future action to combat gender-based discrimination.

1.4. In order to assess the extent to which the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have been implemented, the session will of necessity have to take into account the reports on the World Conference on Human Rights, held in

Vienna in 1993, which were approved at the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, and at the World Summit on Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995.

1.5. The Vienna Conference on Human Rights of 14-25 June 1993 reaffirmed clearly that the human rights of women throughout the life cycle are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.

1.6. The Cairo Conference of 5-13 September 1994 confirmed the key role women play in development and population growth issues. For the first time, the conference highlighted the need to improve the social and economic status of women, and launch education and training programmes to raise their awareness of their rights. Better access to education, information and healthcare is the sine qua non for an improved demographic policy.

1.7. The Copenhagen World Summit (6-12 March 1995) highlighted, for the first time, the 'feminisation' of poverty, and asserted the principle that sustainable development can only be launched by means of economic policies which take social factors and, especially gender differences, fully into account.

1.8. In addition to reaffirming the fact that women's rights are human rights, and cannot be considered in isolation, the Beijing Platform for Action posits three key ideas:

We must highlight gender differences: only true equality of rights and living conditions between men and women can ensure economic growth and fair, sustainable development. Another key point is empowerment, which should not only be considered from the social point of view, as in giving women power and responsibility in decision-making bodies, but also from a personal point of view, i.e. self-fulfilment, and boosting self-confidence and skills. Mainstreaming means including a gender perspective in all actions and in all political, economic and social decisions; rather than being the objective, the gender perspective informs all government action. It is to be hoped that the social partners, NGOs and civil society organisations as a whole will provide continual input and monitoring for mainstreaming issues.

1.9. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identified 12 critical areas of concern: poverty; education and training; health and social services; violence; armed conflict; the economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights; the media; the environment; and the girl-child.

1.10. Implementation of the Platform for Action measures is the responsibility of governments and of institutional and non-governmental bodies operating at national, sub-regional, regional and international level.

## 2. Implementation of the platform for action: obstacles and progress

2.1. Women and poverty: the acknowledgement of the feminisation of poverty has led many governments to promote initiatives in the field of social services, and health and education, which target women who are more socially vulnerable.

The lack of equality in access to capital, resources and the labour market remains, however, one of the determining factors, and this is often aggravated by economic reform policies which rein in social expenditure. This is all the more obvious in the transitional countries of central and eastern Europe, where radical economic restructuring has led to a deterioration in the situation of women.

2.2. Education and training for women: considerable progress has been made in this area, although there has been little investment to improve education infrastructure, and in many countries there is clearly a need for root and branch reform of the education systems.

2.3. Women and health: fewer women are dying in childbirth; greater use is made of contraceptives, and more attention is being paid to specifically women's problems, especially those of older women; and programmes to reduce transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are widespread. However, research and technology still lack a gender-based approach; public infrastructure has often proved inadequate, owing to a lack of human and financial resources; the general situation has deteriorated in many states, partly because services have sometimes been privatised without guaranteeing access for the weakest population groups; instruments for safeguarding and improving the health and safety of women in the workplace are still unsatisfactory. A case in point is the fact that some governments would like to see protection standards lowered in the forthcoming revised version of the ILO's 1952 Convention No 103 on Maternity Protection.

2.4. Violence against women: many governments have introduced stricter legislation to protect women from various forms of violence; they have set up specific departments and special units for women who are the victims of violence, and have prepared educational material and prevention campaigns; women's protest and support networks are on the increase. Genital mutilation is still widespread in southern countries and in immigrant communities. There is still a lack of data about the various forms violence takes, and information and prevention programmes are still inadequate. Governments pay scant attention to campaigns to recognise various forms of violence — including genital mutilation, ethnic rape and trafficking — against women as grounds for granting political asylum. Trafficking, which targets women and children in particular, is on the increase.

2.5. Women and armed conflict: the Statutes of the International Tribunals in Yugoslavia and Rwanda and those of the International Criminal Court include ad hoc regulations, and all international humanitarian legislation tends increasingly to recognise the different way armed conflict impacts on men and women, and to adopt a gender perspective, particularly as far as refugee status is concerned. The role women play in conflict solving and peacekeeping has not yet been stressed sufficiently. Ethnic rape, although considered a crime against humanity, still goes unpunished.

2.6. Women and the economy: many governments have incorporated international provisions on the economic rights of women into national law; many EU countries are introducing provisions on parental leave, and there are now more women in the labour market, particularly in the service sector. Unfortunately, progress has not been made across the board and there are still serious inequalities in the rural sector and informal economies; and there is still a wide earnings gap between men and women.

2.7. Women, power and decision-making: Many governments have adopted policies and actions in favour of women in this area, and have launched programmes — including training programmes — to make it easier for women to be part of the political and institutional decision-making process, inter alia by introducing measures to help men and women share family and professional responsibilities. However, true equality is still some way away.

2.8. Institutional mechanisms for promotion, analysis and assessment have been created and strengthened in many countries in order to encourage equal opportunities. However, these have often been hampered by their low profile, and lack of a clear mandate and adequate resources; these institutions have often tended to be sidelined, and have no real political autonomy.

2.9. Human rights of women: Women's rights are human rights. While the various national legislations now include provisions on human rights and women, particularly with regard to marriage, work and the right to own property, discrimination does still exist. In addition to discrimination in law, de facto discrimination as a result of cultural values, traditional attitudes and ingrained stereotypes, is rife.

Ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women continues apace, but there is still a lack of consensus and some governments are uneasy about incorporating the provisions of the Convention in their legal systems.

2.10. Women and the media: recent years have seen the growth of women's information networks, thanks to technological progress which has made it easier for women to access the media, and multiplied the opportunities to spread female culture and exchange opinions; women are still under-represented in positions of responsibility in the media world; the press is still dominated by men and puts out a negative, stereotyped image of women; in some parts of the world, pornography is on the increase. Particularly worrying is the spread of pornography on the Internet, as is the lack of computer monitoring, filter and child-lock devices.

There is still, then, a need to open up the information sector to women, both in order to involve them in decision-making, and to spread non-discriminatory cultural models. It is increasingly clear that we need systems to monitor and filter-out degrading images of women.

2.11. Women and the environment: women are currently raising their profile in national environmental policies, partly thanks to eco-training, and partly thanks to the drive to create paid employment for women. Women are still under-represented in the policy-framing and decision-making stages. It is important to stress the vital work rural women do in agri-

environmental policy, within the framework of the multifunctional agriculture provided for in Agenda 2000. The role of women has not only been recognised in relation to strictly agricultural work, but also in connection with diversification of the rural environment, whenever they use environmentally-friendly methods and promote the quality and specificity of their produce and of the services they provide.

2.12. The girl-child has only quite recently become the focus of specific attention; ad hoc policies are being formulated but there is still a lack of adequate statistics which take account of gender and age differences, and which would allow policymakers to focus on the specifics of the problem and prepare more effective initiatives. There are virtually no training and information programmes to help counter the spread of drug abuse and all forms of teenage exploitation and sexual abuse. Many countries still do not apply the international standards established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 32) and by the International Labour Organisation as regards the elimination of economic exploitation of child labour.

### 3. Europe and the European Institutions

3.1. The conclusions adopted in Geneva (19-21 January 2000) by the Economic Commission for Europe's (ECE) Regional Preparatory Meeting on the 2000 Review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, reaffirmed government commitment to tackling the 12 critical areas identified in 1995. The European Regional Conference, however, looks at five areas:

1. Women and the economy
2. Violence against women and children
3. Women and girls in armed conflict situations
4. Women in power and decision-making
5. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.

3.2. Starting from the premise that women's rights are an inalienable, integral part of human rights, the Geneva Conclusions refer directly to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, to the Convention on Children's Rights, and to the Vienna Conference on Human Rights.

3.2.1. The document recalls the various UN-sponsored initiatives which have reaffirmed the need for an equal opportunities policy: the 1995 Beijing Platform, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action; the 1997 Commission on

Women and the Economy, and its Resolution on Women and Poverty; the ILO's 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work; and the 1999 ECOSOC Ministerial Communiqué entitled 'The Role of Employment and Work in Poverty Eradication'.

3.2.2. For their part, the Members of the Council of Europe and the European Union reaffirmed their commitment to the 1992 Directive on Maternity Leave; the 1996 Directive on Parental Leave; the Recommendation on reconciling work with family life; the Declaration on Equality between Men and Women as a Fundamental Criterion of Democracy (Istanbul, 1997), the Council of Europe European Social Charter; and the EU Council Resolutions on the 1997, 1998 and 1999 Employment Guidelines.

These are the most important steps taken by the European institutions at various levels.

3.3. During the Finnish presidency (2nd semester 1999) a report was drawn up on indicators and benchmarks for 'Women in power and decision-making'.

3.4. The Portuguese presidency of the European Union submitted a written statement to the ECE Regional Conference, committing the EU Member States to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in full. The fact that five priority areas have been selected to be addressed at the conference does not, however, obviate the need to embrace all 12 points of the Platform for Action.

3.4.1. Significant progress has been made since the 1995 Beijing Conference. This is borne out by the annual review of the implementation of the Platform for Action, carried out by the Member States and the European institutions. It is backed up by strategies and methods to facilitate mainstreaming of gender issues — especially as regards employment policy, the Structural Funds, women's access to a career and to decision-making, and the fight against violence.

3.4.2. Moreover, indicators and benchmarks are needed to highlight the benefits and shortcomings of equal opportunities policies in the political, economic and social fields.

3.5. In preparation for the ECE Conference, the Commission drew up an information note which reviewed progress achieved in the five areas addressed by the European regional conference.

3.6. The Amsterdam Treaty made equal opportunities policies one of the key objectives of the European Union. The most important instrument for equal opportunities programmes and projects is the European Social Fund, which has directly promoted specific actions, such as 'Employment Now'.

3.7. In addition to the European Social Fund, all the Structural Funds have been mobilised in promoting equality (1996 Council Resolution 'Mainstreaming equal opportunities for women and men into the European Structural Funds').

3.8. The employment guidelines chapter of the February 1999 Council Resolution reaffirmed the need to boost equal opportunities policies within the national action plans (NAP).

3.9. One of the specific instruments adopted at Community level is the fourth medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for women and men (1996-2000). The programme has six objectives:

- to mainstream gender issues;
- mobilise all stakeholders to achieve equality;
- promote equal opportunities in a changing economy;
- reconcile family and working life;
- promote gender balance in decision-making; and
- create optimum conditions for equal rights.

3.9.1. A fifth Community framework programme on gender equality is currently being drafted by the Commission. The programme will take on board the Beijing + 5 review process, and will be based on the mainstreaming strategy developed at EU level since 1995.

3.10. Other Community programmes focusing specifically on equal opportunities have also had a positive impact. These programmes (Daphne and STOP) aim to combat violence against women and children, and trafficking in women and children. Information campaigns targeting women have been launched in Bulgaria and Hungary, in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration (this is the Commission's first programme on the subject).

3.11. The needs of women also need to be included in other policies such as external relations, including development cooperation, and education and training. The Leonardo da Vinci programme on vocational training focuses specifically on promoting equal opportunities between women and men as a means of combating all forms of discrimination. The fifth research and development framework programme includes a specific budget heading for 'women and science'. Gender issues have been mainstreamed in the EU's external relations policies, and especially in development cooperation (1998 Council regulation on integrating gender in development cooperation) and human rights policies through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights.

3.12. A campaign to combat violence against women was launched in 1998. The campaign focuses particularly on domestic violence and seeks to raise awareness amongst the public with a focus on men, in combating this kind of violence. The campaign aims to achieve zero tolerance towards violence against women and to involve various civil society stakeholders, including NGOs, in mainly preventive action. Violence against women can also be combated through regional cooperation programmes, including human rights initiatives (Latin America, Mediterranean countries, central and eastern Europe).

3.13. A feature of violence against women is the way they are affected by armed conflict, which sees them as both victim and hostage at one and the same time. On the other hand, important Meda Democracy initiatives and projects in Cyprus, Jerusalem, the Lebanon, etc. have shown the need to boost the role of women in the peace process. In 1998, ECHO launched an international campaign entitled 'A flower for the women of Kabul'.

#### 4. General comments

4.1. The Committee welcomes the considerable progress which has been made in the five years since the 1995 Beijing Platform. The road to full equality between women and men is still long and strewn with obstacles. The Committee would therefore like to see a strengthening of the machinery which has been set up at various levels (national, European, global) over the last few years, and calls for the existing legislative framework to be applied consistently in all States.

4.2. By adopting a coherent policy for the reform of the major international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation, the European Union can help these important economic and monetary institutions to shape ad hoc policies and specific programmes to combat poverty and the ghettoisation of women.

4.3. In order to achieve this, the European Union and its Member States should work actively with these international bodies to promote a strong, high-level presence of women, especially in decision-making posts.

4.4. Inequality and discrimination are not just a social problem; they are also a structural problem. Reform of the European institutions will therefore have to take this into account.

#### 5. Proposals and conclusions

5.1. The Committee believes it is essential to boost cooperation, information and activities between the European institutions, in particular with the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission.

5.2. The European Union will have to put in place ad hoc analysis machinery (data banks, statistics, research) which take account of gender and age differences, and ensure the information is disseminated as widely as possible. Moreover, it will have to frame further actions and initiatives which take account of the trend towards globalisation — a process which opens up new opportunities for some sectors of the female population, while excluding others.

5.3. An obvious example is the take-up of new technologies. This is a vital factor in development, but could also lead to a new form of exclusion for the poorer sections of society. The Committee considers that these people should also be guaranteed access to new technologies, so that they form a real development factor and generate new jobs.

5.4. For example, migratory flows create new job opportunities for women, but since they often elude any kind of control, they also conceal and nurture phenomena such as trafficking and the abuse that goes with it. The Committee believes that migratory flows need to be monitored, as the problem has now taken on worrying proportions, and efforts to tackle it should be stepped up (via programmes such as STOP and Daphne).

5.5. The Committee believes it is essential to give due weight to improving the employment prospects of women, bridging the wide pay gaps which still exist, and ensuring that women and men are able to balance career and family life. The social partners and collective bargaining have a vital role to play here.

5.6. The Committee believes that the two-fold discrimination which can affect women from the most vulnerable sections of society, including ethnic minorities, immigrants, the young, the disabled, and those who are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, must be rooted out.



5.7. The European Union should commit itself to ensuring that all Member States sign the UN Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Optional Protocol. A European legal framework is needed to combat all forms of violence and abuse against women.

5.8. Demographic trends will also require adequate solutions to the problem of the ageing population, taking into account the different percentage of men and women.

5.9. Mindful of the high rates of female illiteracy, especially in the EU's lagging regions, and of the fact that education is a vital factor in the development and welfare of a society, the Committee calls for more robust support programmes to

promote female education and tackle the dropout rate. These programmes should focus particularly on girls.

5.10. Equality and human rights cannot just be decreed from on high. They require the full, democratic participation of the whole of society. Consequently, cooperation with the social partners and NGOs, and with citizens' associations and organisations at various levels, will be essential.

5.11. The Committee feels it is vital that the next UN General Assembly should launch preparations for a fifth UN World Conference on Women in 2005.

5.12. Turning to its own specific role, the Committee feels that it should be included in the Commission delegation to the forthcoming UN General Assembly Special Session.

Brussels, 27 April 2000.

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

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