

'Romano Prodi and Göke Frerichs sign new joint protocol' from CES-Info

Caption: Article from the Economic and Social Committee's monthly publication CES-Info on arrangements for cooperation between the European Commission and the ESC. 'Exploratory opinions' are a prime example of such cooperation.

Source: CES-Info. Monthly publication by the European Economic and Social Committee. REditor Foster, Nick. October 2001, No 8. Brussels: Press Service of the European Economic and Social Committee.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/romano_prodi_and_goke_frerichs_sign_new_joint_protocol_from_ces_info-en-5fba3ac-23b3-4d51-b46e-01e2c44c5ac2.html

Publication date: 16/09/2012

Romano Prodi and Göke Frerichs sign new joint protocol

On Monday 24 September — just as the last issue of CES Info was going to press — Mr Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission, and Mr Göke Frerichs, president of the European ESC, signed a **protocol to put new vigour into arrangements for cooperation between the two bodies**.

The key feature of the protocol is its **explicit recognition of the ESC's mission as an indispensable intermediary between the EU institutions and organised civil society**; it must therefore be in a position to consolidate its ties with the relevant associations and categories. The protocol also contains a pledge from the Commission to **draw upon support from the ESC to step up its relations with organised civil society**.

Operationally, the protocol introduces joint work sessions to review medium-term Commission initiatives for which the Committee could provide a substantial contribution. **This will inter alia allow the ESC to provide input — in the form of “exploratory opinions” — further up the consultative procedure before the Commission has released its proposal on a given topic**.

The protocol also commits the Commission to systematically provide and explain the reasons why **comments contained in ESC opinions** have or have not been taken into consideration.

At the signing ceremony, **Mr Prodi** — referring to the ESC as the bridge between civil society and the Union — noted that the protocol aimed at “transparency, effectiveness and clarity” and was part-and-parcel of the process of reform at EU level. As such, it marked a step forward in the strengthening of the Union's institutions. For his part, **Mr Frerichs** pledged “simpler, shorter and clearer” ESC opinions. He also recalled that a number of key challenges facing the ESC as the mouthpiece of organised civil society at EU level now lay outside the Union, in the form of the Committee's work in the candidate countries, as well as in the ACP states, Mercosur and India.