

European Economic and Social Committee and ECSC Consultative Committee

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European Economic and Social Committee and ECSC Consultative Committee

The European Economic and Social Committee

The Economic and Social Committee, which became the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) following the change to its Rules of Procedure adopted in July 2002, is a consultative body serving the Council, the Commission and, since the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, the European Parliament. It represents the various categories of economic and social activity in organised civil society. Its advisory capacity enables it to take part in the Community decision-making process and to respond to the need for a more democratic approach when implementing European Union policies.

Established by the 1957 Rome Treaties, it is an institution which is common to the European Community (EC) and to the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom). The specific nature of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) justified the maintenance of the Consultative Committee, whose role was to assist the Commission until expiry of the ECSC Treaty in July 2002 (Articles 18 and 19 of the ECSC Treaty).

The Committee was created in order to involve representatives of the various spheres of economic and social activity in the establishment of the Common Market. The aim was to enable organised economic and social bodies to participate in the Community decision-making process. Originally, the Committee would meet only at the request of the Council or of the Commission, and the Treaties made provision for mandatory referral on only a small number of issues (agriculture, free movement of persons and services, transport and social policy).

The 1972 Paris Summit decided to recognise the right of the Committee to act on its own initiative. Accordingly, since the changes made to its Rules of Procedure in 1974, the Committee may deliver opinions on its own initiative.

The issues where referral to the Committee is mandatory have been successively extended in the light of the various amendments made to the Rome Treaties which gave new competences to the Community. This was the case with the 1986 Single European Act (approximation of laws, technological research and development, the environment, etc.), in 1992 with the Treaty on European Union, signed in Maastricht (Trans-European Networks, industry, Cohesion Fund, fiscal arrangements, etc.), and in 1997 with the Treaty of Amsterdam (employment, equal pay, equal treatment and public health).

The Maastricht Treaty also granted the Committee the right to meet on its own initiative and to establish its Rules of Procedure, while the Treaty of Amsterdam provides for the consultation of the Committee by the European Parliament.

Although the Committee is not one of the Community's institutions as named in the clauses of the founding Treaties, it is nevertheless autonomous as regards both its organisation and operation. Its status and its role mean that it occupies a special place amongst the numerous committees serving the institutions.

The ECSC Consultative Committee

In accordance with the 1951 Treaty of Paris, a Consultative Committee was established to serve the ECSC High Authority. It represented the interests of producers, workers and users in the coal and steel sectors. The Consultative Committee held its inaugural session on 26 January 1953 in Luxembourg.

After 1967, when the Treaty establishing a Single Council and a Single Commission of the European Communities, known as the 'Merger Treaty', entered into force, the Economic and Social Committee and the ECSC Consultative Committee continued to be two independent bodies, which worked together when the Commission asked them for an opinion on the same subject.

With the expiry of the ECSC Treaty at the end of July 2002, the coal and steel sectors have since been

integrated into the Treaty establishing the European Community (EC). The EESC has thus taken over the ECSC Consultative Committee's activities.

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