



## THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a consultative body of the European Union. It is composed of 329 members. Its opinions are required on the basis of a mandatory consultation in the fields established by the Treaties or a voluntary consultation by the Commission, the Council, or Parliament. It may also issue opinions on its own initiative. Its members are not bound by any instructions. They are to be completely independent in the performance of their duties, in the Union's general interest.

### LEGAL BASIS

Article 13(4) of the TEU, Articles 300-304 of the TFEU, [Council Decision \(EU\) 2019/853 determining the composition of the European Economic and Social Committee](#) and subsequent Council decisions, appointing the members of the European Economic and Social Committee, proposed by different Member States, [Council Decision 2015/1600](#) appointing the members of the European Economic and Social Committee for the period from 21 September 2015 to 20 September 2020.

### COMPOSITION

**A.** Number and national allocation of seats (Article 301 of the TFEU and Council Decision (EU) 2019/853 determining the composition of the European Economic and Social Committee).

The EESC currently has 329 members, divided between the Member States as follows:

- 24 each for Germany, France and Italy;
- 21 each for Poland and Spain;
- 15 for Romania;
- 12 each for Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden;
- 9 each for Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania and Slovakia;
- 7 each for Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia;
- 6 for Luxembourg and Cyprus;
- 5 for Malta.



Overall, the size of the Committee has been reduced from 350 to 329 members with effect of 1 February 2020 (following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU).

#### **B. Method of appointment (Article 302 of the TFEU)**

The members of the Committee are appointed by the Council by qualified majority, on the basis of proposals by the Member States<sup>[1]</sup>. The Council consults the Commission on these nominations (Article 302(2) of the TFEU). The Member States must ensure that the various categories of economic and social activity are adequately represented. In practice, one third of the seats goes to employers, one third to employees and one third to other categories (farmers, retailers, the liberal professions, consumers etc.).

The maximum number of EESC members allowed by the Treaty of Lisbon is 350 (Article 301 of the TFEU). This was briefly exceeded between July 2013 and September 2015 owing to the accession of Croatia on 1 July 2013. By adding nine new seats for the new Member State, total membership increased to 353 (from 344). [Council Decision \(EU\) 2015/1157](#) adapted the composition of the EESC following the accession of Croatia, the number of members for each of Estonia, Cyprus and Luxembourg was reduced by one in order to address the discrepancy between the maximum number of members of the EESC set out in the first paragraph of Article 301 of the TFEU and the number of members following the accession of Croatia. Therefore, the number of members for Luxembourg and Cyprus was decreased from six to five each, and the number of Estonian members from seven to six. [Council Decision \(EU\) 2019/853](#) finally determined the composition of the EESC in line with the distribution of seats in the Committee of the Regions, which also has 329 members and due to the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, which resulted in 24 vacant seats. The number of members for Luxembourg and Cyprus was therefore again increased from five to six each, and the number of Estonian members from six to seven.

#### **C. Type of mandate (Article 301 of the TFEU)**

The members of the Committee are nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council for a renewable five-year term of office (Article 302 of the TFEU). They are drawn from economic and social interest groups in Europe. The latest renewal was in October 2015, for the 2015-2020 term of office.

They belong to one of three groups:

- [Employers](#) (Group I);
- [Workers](#) (Group II);
- [Diversity Europe](#) (Group III).

The members must be completely independent in the performance of their duties, in the general interest of the EU (Article 300(4) of the TFEU). Every time a member's or alternate member's seat on the EESC becomes vacant following the end of their term of office, a separate Council decision is needed to replace that member.

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[1]e.g. [Council Decision \(EU, Euratom\) 2019/1572 of 16 September 2019 appointing a member, proposed by the Federal Republic of Germany, of the European Economic and Social Committee.](#)



## ORGANISATION AND PROCEDURES

The Committee is not among the institutions listed in Article 13(1) of the TEU (although Article 13(4) states that it assists Parliament, the Council and the Commission by exercising consultative activities), but it does have a large degree of autonomy in its organisation and operation.

- The President and the Bureau, each with a term of office of two and a half years, are appointed by the Committee from among its members.
- The Committee adopts its own rules of procedure.
- It may meet on its own initiative, but it normally meets at the request of the Council or the Commission.
- To help prepare its opinions, it has six specialised sections for the various fields of EU activity (and can set up subcommittees to deal with specific subjects):
  - Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment ([NAT](#));
  - Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion ([ECO](#));
  - Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship ([SOC](#));
  - External Relations ([REX](#));
  - The Single Market, Production and Consumption ([INT](#));
  - Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society ([TEN](#)).

For the sake of synergy effects, it shares its permanent secretariat services in Brussels with the secretariat of the Committee of the Regions (with regard to its seat in Brussels, see Protocol No 6 to the Lisbon Treaty on the location of the seats of the institutions). In addition, the Bureau of Parliament also entered into an agreement with the Committee, in the framework of the 2014 budgetary procedure, to jointly realise efficiency gains in the area of translation. The Committee has an annual administrative budget, included in section VI of the EU budget, of EUR 131 million (2014).

## POWERS

The Committee was set up by the 1957 Rome Treaties in order to involve economic and social interest groups in the establishment of the common market and to provide institutional machinery for briefing the Commission and the Council of Ministers on European issues. The Single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (1992) extended the range of issues that must be referred to the Committee. The Amsterdam Treaty further broadened the areas for referral to the Committee, and allowed it to be consulted by Parliament. On average, the EESC delivers 170 advisory documents and opinions a year (of which about 15% are issued on its own initiative). Opinions are published in the Official Journal. The Committee has an advisory function (Article 300 of the TFEU). Its purpose is to inform the institutions responsible for EU decision-making of the opinions of the representatives of economic and social activity.



## **A. Opinions issued at the request of EU institutions**

### **1. Mandatory consultation**

In certain specifically mentioned areas, the TFEU stipulates that a decision may be taken only after the Council or Commission has consulted the Committee. These areas are:

- Agricultural policy (Article 43);
- Free movement of persons and services (Articles 46, 50 and 59);
- Transport policy (Articles 91, 95 and 100);
- Harmonisation of indirect taxation (Article 113);
- Approximation of laws on the internal market (Articles 114 and 115);
- Employment policy (Articles 148, 149 and 153);
- Social policy, education, vocational training and youth (Articles 156, 165 and 166);
- Public health (Article 168);
- Consumer protection (Article 169);
- Trans-European networks (Article 172);
- Industrial policy (Article 173);
- Economic, social and territorial cohesion (Article 175);
- Research and technological development and space (Articles 182 and 188);
- The environment (Article 192).

### **2. Voluntary consultation**

The Committee may also be consulted by Parliament, the Commission or the Council on any other matter as they see fit. When these institutions consult the Committee, whether on a mandatory or voluntary basis, they may set it a time limit (of at least one month) after which the absence of an opinion cannot prevent them from taking further action (Article 304 of the TFEU).

## **B. Issuing an opinion on its own initiative**

The Committee may decide to issue an opinion whenever it considers such action appropriate.

Udo Bux  
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