

PRESS

European Economic and Social Committee



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ESC plenary session, January 2002: Committee calls for the introduction of a temporary job seekers' visa for non-EU nationals

- ESC names its observers to the Convention

Meeting in its January plenary session, the ESC chose its three observers to the Convention set up by the Laeken European Summit to prepare for a root-and-branch revision of the treaties. These are:

Mr Göke Frerichs, president;

Mr Roger Briesch, chair of the Workers' Group; and

Mrs Anne-Marie Sigmund, chair of the Various Interests Group.

Their alternates shall be:

Mr Ian Little, chair of the Employers' Group;

Mr Gianni Vinay, vice-president; and

Mr Jan Olsson, chair of the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship.

- Mr Philippe Maystadt, EIB president, and Spanish State Secretary Mr Ramón de Miguel guests at January plenary session

Speaking in the afternoon of 16 January, **Mr Philippe Maystadt**, president of the European Investment Bank, gave ESC members an overview of the Bank's activities, with a particular emphasis on the EIB's reasons for making loans. He highlighted the key areas of the environment and urban renewal. Loans outside the Union prioritised the candidate countries and, to a lesser extent, the Balkans and the Mediterranean region. Mr Maystadt commented that the Bank had until now "led an isolated life with little dialogue with other parts of society" and ended his speech by making *a specific request to the European ESC*: to help the Bank in establishing such dialogue with Europe's interest groups. He also asked the ESC for its input into a number of areas in which the EIB was defining its strategy. These included employment, "employability" (including training), and regional issues.

On 17 January, **Mr Ramón de Miguel**, Spanish State Secretary for European Affairs, addressed the plenary on behalf of the Spanish EU presidency. He noted the ESC's "primary role... particularly after the signature of the new protocol with the European Commission". He then set out the priorities of the Spanish EU presidency to the assembly: *inter alia* combating terrorism; making the euro a continuing success; the Barcelona process; EU enlargement (and the closing of a number of particularly thorny chapters); and Europe's image in the world. For their part, various ESC members stressed the need for the Spanish presidency to *work hard to stimulate the creation of more jobs* in the EU, to strive to make *real progress in respect of the market for financial services*, to raise the *acceptance level of the euro outside Europe*, and to find an *imaginative and humanitarian response to the question of third-country immigration to the Union* (see below).

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Key opinions:

- ESC calls for the introduction of a temporary job seekers' visa for non-EU nationals

The Committee's January plenary session saw adoption of an opinion on the **Conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals**. The document was adopted without any votes against, and two abstentions. The rapporteur was Mr Pariza, a member of the Workers' Group and director of the Spanish trade union Comisiones Obreras.

In the opinion, the ESC calls for a ***new, second legal channel for third-country nationals to be introduced to provide temporary entry to a Member State in order to seek employment***: this is essential, especially where employees and migrant workers must know each other beforehand. For this reason the Committee proposes introducing a temporary six-month entry and residence permit for the purpose of seeking work.

In the Committee's view, the fact that applications for residence for the purpose of paid employment or self-employed economic activities may be submitted in the territory of the Member State concerned only if the applicant is legally present there, constitutes a condition which may ***prevent existing illegal immigrants from regularising their situation***.

The Committee holds that third-country nationals applying for renewal of a "residence permit - worker" ***should not be required to demonstrate that the job vacancy cannot be filled in the short term by citizens of the Union***.

The ESC calls for ***permit renewal requirements*** to be simplified as far as possible, and for the initial restriction to specific professional activities or fields of activities or to specific regions to be lifted.

Speaking in an interview with Deutsche Welle following the adoption of the opinion, Mr Pariza stressed the need for the need to ***"eradicate the illegal channels for immigration from non-EU countries to the Union, and in so doing strike a blow at the criminal organisations that are behind this trade and which take advantage of people who, in most cases, come to the EU with a genuine desire to work"***. Both from the point of view of demographics - in particular the EU's stagnant birth rate - and related issues such as the future of pension provision, opening up the Union's job market to more non-EU nationals was "the right way forward".

- ESC calls on the Commission to set up a "plant protein" plan at Community level

On 16 January the ESC adopted an additional opinion entitled **A New impetus for a plan for plant protein crops in the Community**. The rapporteur was Mr Sabin (Various Interests, France). The document was adopted without any dissenting votes, and three abstentions.

The opinion calls on the European Commission to set up a ***"plant protein" plan at Community level*** as part of the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy. This would include measures to ***promote protein crops*** (to re-establish fair incomes for these crops and halt their decline); measures to encourage the ***development of non-food sectors***; steps to set up a ***safety net*** to help oilseed and protein crop producers (the market is highly volatile); and efforts to make use of the ***second pillar of the CAP***.

EU applicant countries also have a shortfall of plant proteins. The Committee recommends that the Commission pay special attention to developing these countries' production. For more on this issue, and in particular on the findings of an ESC hearing held in December 2001 on ***Plant protein crops: their future and their role in animal nutrition***, please see the previous edition of CES Info.

- Concern about job satisfaction and working conditions in the seafaring professions

With 94 votes in favour, none against, and two abstentions, the ESC has adopted an opinion on the Commission's communication on **Training and recruitment of seafarers** *.

The opinion calls on the Member States to **apply in full the Commission's guidelines on state aid in maritime transport**, and to secure improvements in onboard living and working conditions by ratifying and enforcing relevant international standards - such as those adopted by the ILO. The Member States and the social partners should work together to see how better use can be made of the existing EU aid measures such as the European Social Fund, Socrates, Leonardo and Equal to promote basic and further training. Moreover, the social partners should endeavour to boost the **social prestige and job satisfaction of the seafaring professions** (e.g. in respect of wages, convenient rotation times, etc.).

*Rapporteur: Mr Chagas (Workers, Portugal)

- A trans-European inland waterway network ready for EU enlargement

The ESC has adopted an own-initiative opinion on the **Future of the trans-European inland waterway network**. The document was adopted by 90 votes to two. The rapporteur was Mr Levieux, a French member of the Committee's Employers' Group.

The opinion sets out the case for taking a range of incentive measures so that in the future enlarged Union there is a network of navigable inland waterways that meets market demand, while respecting the principles of sustainable development. The opinion makes specific recommendations in the following areas: (a) **bottlenecks**, (b) **intermodality** (more initiatives are needed to promote intermodal transport, of which inland waterways are one element), and (c) **regulations, customs and duties**. With respect to (c), the ESC calls for the removal of unjustifiable charges collected by sea ports and the speedy abolition of the special charges levied on new boats as part of the "old for new" rule. Furthermore, a single Community certificate, enabling bargemen to travel on all inland waterways, is needed.

- New securities: ESC highly critical of Commission's proposals regarding prospectuses

On 17 January the ESC adopted an opinion on the **Prospectus to be published when securities are offered to the public or admitted to trading**. Introducing the opinion in plenary, the rapporteur, Mr Levitt (Employers, UK) regretted that the "welcome aims of the (Commission's) explanatory memorandum are not consistent with the actual text of the proposed directive". The opinion's criticisms of the Commission's proposal include:

(a) the **inadequate differentiation of prospectus requirements** appropriate for institutional and private placements (i.e. a tiered approach is needed to give small investors more detail) - unless amended these would impose burdensome and unnecessary requirements;

(b) the **withdrawal of the right of the issuer to choose where to make issues** (the "Home State" principle); and

(c) the **costly requirement for translation** when making cross-border issues resulting from the removal of freedom of choice of the competent authority.

The opinion was adopted by 92 votes to one, with three abstentions.

N.B.: The assembly agreed by a majority vote to postpone adoption of the opinion on the Commission's Green Paper on **Corporate Social Responsibility** to the February plenary session.

Other opinions adopted in the course of the session:

PRISM 2001 (SMO) (additional own-initiative opinion)

Rapporteur: Ms Sirkeinen (Gr. I - FIN)

Fertilisers

Rapporteur: Mr Bento Gonçalves (Gr. III - P)

Interoperability of and access to trans-European networks for the electronic interchange of data between administrations (IDA)

Rapporteur: Mr Bernabei (Gr. I - I)

Indication of the ingredients present in foodstuffs

Rapporteur: Ms Davison (Gr. III - UK)

Jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgements in matters of parental responsibility

Rapporteur: Ms Carroll (Gr. I - IRL)

Co-rapporteurs: Ms zu Eulenburg (Gr. III - D)

Mr Retureau (Gr. II - F)

Administrative cooperation in the field of VAT

Rapporteur: Mr Walker (Gr. I - UK)

Protection of forests against atmospheric pollution and fire

Rapporteur-general: Mr Kallio (Gr. III- FIN)

Quota system for potato starch

Rapporteur-general: Mr Donnelly (Gr. III - IRL)

Measures for the smaller Aegean islands concerning agricultural products

Rapporteur-general: Mr Papamichaol (Gr. II - EL)

Insider dealing and market manipulation (market abuse)

Rapporteur: Mr Levitt (Gr. I - UK)

Helping SMEs to Go Digital (Communication)

Rapporteur : Mr Dimitriadis (Gr. I - EL)

The full text of the above opinions in all eleven official EU languages will shortly be available on the ESC web site at www.esc.eu.int.

Interested in finding out more about the role and activities of the European ESC? Contact Nick Foster, press officer, on tel. 32 2 546 9207, e-mail: press@esc.eu.int.