



# efc briefing

## eu affairs

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### Act now to support campaign for a better representation of civil society in EU consultative body

European civil society organisations and networks, including the EFC, are running a joint campaign in the run up to the renewal of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in September 2010. The campaign calls on the governments of the EU 27 to ensure that the composition of the Committee reflects more the diversity of organised civil society in the Member States. In other words, it requests that the importance of the contribution of civil society organisations (CSOs) be fully recognised, as they represent interests other than those pursued by business and trade unions, for the well-being of European citizens and the strengthening of the social and societal cohesion of the EU.

EFC and DAFNE members are invited to support the campaign at the national level. They can join the process by writing to the competent authorities, which will select and appoint the new EESC members in their respective countries, and raising their awareness of the need to ensure better representation of the diversity of organised civil society in their appointments to the Committee. There is not much time to act as the Member States will finalise their nominations by March. To facilitate the process you can use the following template letter, see [http://www.efc.be/EUAdvocacy/Documents/Campaign letter EESC renewal.pdf](http://www.efc.be/EUAdvocacy/Documents/Campaign%20letter%20EESC%20renewal.pdf) (276kb)

Indeed the current make up of the EESC does not adequately reflect the diversity and the developments of organised civil society in the EU. Currently CSOs which are gathered in the Committee "Various Interests" Group (Group III) make up less than a third of the EESC 344 members<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, only about 35% of Group III itself, are representatives of civil society organisations –e.g. associations, foundations, mutual organisations, NGOs- other than employers and employees' organisations!

We strongly believe that the future make up of the Various Interests Group (Group III) of the Committee must adequately reflect the panorama and realities of organised civil society.

In so doing, Member States would contribute, not only to guaranteeing a broader participation by organised civil society players in the democratic life of the Union, but also to increasing the credibility and effectiveness of the European Economic and Social Committee, giving it greater authority in its role as the institutional representative of organised civil society and relay of its concerns, expectations and demands. This is all the more important in the light of the new provisions of the Lisbon Treaty on participatory democracy and of the need to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of public institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee is made up of 344 members from national organisations from the 27 EU Member States and it is structured into three Groups: **the "Employers" group**, which consists of members coming from private and public sector of industry, of SMEs, of chambers of commerce, retail and wholesale, banks and insurance companies, transports and agriculture; **the "Employees" group** which represents all the categories of employees, from workers to top executives. Its members represent national trade union organisations; **the "Various Interests" group**, which brings together representatives from sectors of economic, social and civic life that are not covered by the first two groups.

With the entry in force of the Lisbon Treaty, EESC members will now be appointed for a five-year period by Council of Ministers of the European Union on the basis of nominations by the Member States.

The national appointment procedures by the 27 EU Member States of the EESC members have been pointed out as a source of criticism of this European body.

The fact that it is a deep-rooted practice and an exclusive prerogative of the Member States makes it more difficult to adapt the composition of EESC to socio-economic changes. This exclusive competence of national authorities to designate EESC Members and the mere formal acceptance of those designations by the Council has been frequently criticised by European networks and other civil society organisations at national level. The renewal of EESC members this autumn is an opportunity that concerned parties must take to make their voice heard.

See: [The European Economic and Social Committee appointment procedures and competent authorities in the 27 EU member States](#)<sup>2</sup>.

For further information please contact Emmanuelle Faure at the EFC secretariat at [eu@efc.be](mailto:eu@efc.be)

### **For the record: about the EESC**<sup>3</sup>

Established in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome, the EESC is a consultative body of the EU and an integral part of its institutional set-up. It is the official body through which organised civil society is represented, consulted and informed, and which acts as its voice, therefore enabling the representatives of economic, social, socio-vocational and civic organisations to be an integral part of the EU policy-shaping and decision-making processes at EU level. The EESC main task is to advise the three major institutions: the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. It is mandatory for the Committee to be consulted on those issues stipulated in the Treaties and where the institutions deem it appropriate. It can also take the initiative to issue (own initiative) opinions e.g. on the European Foundation Statute due by April 2010.

Read: [Background information on the role and functioning of the EESC](#)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This document reflects the situation that prevailed in 2006. Some changes regarding the nomination procedures might have occurred since then. See

<http://www.efc.be/EUAdvocacy/Documents/NominationproceduresacrossEUmemberStatesupdate.pdf> (159kb)

<sup>3</sup> [www.eesc.europa.eu](http://www.eesc.europa.eu)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.efc.be/EUAdvocacy/Documents/BackgroundnoteontherolefunctioningoftheEESCupdated.pdf> (49kb)