

A Bureau, consisting of a President, two Vice-Presidents and 33 members, forms the Committee's representative body. The President is elected from the membership representing the employers, the workers and those representing other categories of economic and social activity. The President is responsible for the smooth operation of Ecosoc and represents the Committee in its external relations. If the President is absent, two Vice-Presidents assume responsibility for the Committee's activities. Candidates for the two Vice-Presidents are drawn from the membership representing economic and social categories not already represented by the President. The Vice-Presidents must be nationals of Member States different from each other and from the President.

The Committee is based, and holds its plenary sessions in Brussels. Article 193 of the EC Treaty constituted a mandatory consultation procedure requiring the involvement of EcoSoc in proposals affecting areas such as social, regional and environmental policy (including internal market legislation). EcoSoc also renders opinions on its own initiative which it may formally adopt by a straight majority vote in plenary session. These opinions are developed within one of the Committee's nine composite sections – based on the nine main Treaty areas⁵ – and average 180 a year. The opinions are published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.

The Committee's function is purely advisory and it has no power to take binding decisions. However, the Committee's technically and politically attuned composition gives its involvement with the formulation of Community policies a practical relevance as the resulting policies are ultimately felt by the occupational groups it represents.

The Treaty of Amsterdam strengthens somewhat the consultative role of the EcoSoc. New provisions will be inserted in the EC Treaty and will require that the EcoSoc be consulted on certain aspects of employment, social matters, and public health. A provision which will allow it to be consulted by the European Parliament has also been added to Article 198 of the EC Treaty.

The Committee of the Regions

Created by the TEU, the Committee of the Regions provides a forum in which representatives of local and regional authorities may express opinions on particular areas of interest or concern. The Committee is located in Brussels, and its membership – numbering

222 regular members plus an equal number of alternate members – serve four-year terms. The Committee sits in plenary session five times a year. In addition to the plenary sessions, the Committee's ongoing work is carried out by eight commissions and four sub-commissions.

The Treaty requires that the Committee of the Regions be consulted by the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament in the policy-making process in areas affecting regional interests, notably: cultural "incentive measures", economic and social cohesion, education, public health, the basic rules governing Structural Funds, trans-European transport, telecommunications and energy networks.

The Committee may also take the initiative – its right of self-initiative – to deliver opinions on matters affecting the aforementioned areas or on matters considered to have direct implications for the regions – such as land-use planning – and to voice the positions and concerns of the local and regional representatives.

This role is consistent with the mandate expressed in the preamble to the TEU, and enshrined in the subsidiarity principle which states that decisions should be taken by the level of public authority closest to the citizens. A commission of the Committee was set up specifically to address institutional reform in this context, in anticipation of the IGC.

The Treaty of Amsterdam moderately reinforces the status and institutional position of the Committee of Regions. The Committee of the Regions will have its own organisational structure, separate from the EcoSoc. Consultation with the Committee of the Regions will be compulsory in a couple of additional cases, such as environmental and transport policies. A new incompatibility rule regarding membership in both the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions has been set, although no solution has been found to the problem of a number of members of the Committee of the Regions lacking direct democratic legitimacy.

The ECSC Consultative Committee

Coal and Steel matters are addressed separately by the ECSC Consultative Committee, which consists of 108 representatives of producers, workers, traders and consumers specifically involved with the coal and steel industries.

⁵ Areas such as external relations, economic and monetary matters and protection of the environment.