



Cooperation Agreement between the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee

PREAMBLE

The European Parliament (hereinafter referred to as "the Parliament" or "the EP") and the European Economic and Social Committee (hereinafter referred to as "the Committee" or the "EESC"), jointly referred as "the Parties", consider that it is in their common interest to reinforce their relations through the implementation of this cooperation agreement, with the closer cooperation arrangements for which it provides.

Those arrangements are part of the creation of an environment conducive to greater involvement of civil society organisations, at both national and European levels, in the policy-shaping and decision-making processes of the European Union and to the development of an ongoing structured dialogue between those organisations and the Union institutions, as provided for in Article 11(1) and (2) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

The Parliament and the Committee acknowledge the growing need and the role of the Committee in involving stakeholders and civil society in EU-decision making.

The Committee is a privileged intermediary between civil society organisations and the Union institutions and, in its advisory capacity which is conferred on it by Article 13(4) TEU, has a key role to play in the implementation by those institutions of the provisions of Article 11 TEU.

The Parliament and the Committee cooperate in the accomplishment of the Committee's three fundamental missions as identified by its Mission Statement:

- helping to ensure that the European Union policies and legislation tie in better with economic, social and civic circumstances on the ground, by assisting the European Parliament, Council and European Commission, making use of the Committee members' experience and representativeness, dialogue and efforts to secure consensus serving the general interest;
- promoting the development of a more participatory European Union, which is more in touch with public opinion, by acting as an institutional forum representing, informing, expressing the views of and securing dialogue with organised civil society;
- promoting the values on which European integration is founded and advancing the cause of participatory democracy as well as the role of civil society organisations, in Europe and across the world.

The Parliament and the Committee share the common objective of achieving an economically prosperous, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable Union taking full advantage of the digital society and economy. The Parliament and the Committee agree on the importance of protecting the European Union's core values and the rule of law while making the European Union an attractive place for business and aiming at full employment and social progress and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment.

The Parliament supports a strong advisory role for the Committee (both upstream and downstream) of the Union policymaking and legislative process. For this reason, closer cooperation between MEPs and

EESC Members should be encouraged. The Committee can also contribute to ensure the systemic impact of European organised civil society on EU policies and legislations, as well as evaluating transposition and implementation, with the objective of more informed decision-making, particularly in relation to the provisions having general application, as provided for under Articles 8 to 12 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

The Parliament supports the Committee's initiatives to facilitate, promote and structure dialogue and consultation with European organised civil society, as well as initiatives engaging civil society at large. The Parliament also supports the Committee's initiatives to reinforce relations with the network of Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions in the Member States, so that the Committee can play a full part as a vector for the expectations and aspirations of organised civil society.

This Cooperation Agreement reflects the intention of the EP and the EESC to cooperate in good faith. It constitutes a framework for the achievement of common goals, under the principles of efficiency, flexibility and service to the citizens.

The Parties agree to remain open to any new and innovative forms of cooperation, going beyond the proposals contained in this document. In particular, separate thematic and administrative bilateral agreements and action plans might be agreed to supplement this Cooperation Agreement. They can set out more detailed terms for how the Parties will work together on specific matters of mutual interest to strengthen the delivery of common objectives.

I. INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

1. The Committee shall invite the President of the Parliament to present the strategic objectives of his or her mandate to the EESC Plenary Assembly at the beginning of the President's term-of-office.
2. The President and/or the Vice-President responsible for relations with the Committee, once per year, shall be invited to participate in an EESC Plenary assembly to discuss current political and policy priorities.
3. The Vice-President responsible for relations with the Committee and the President of the Committee shall endeavour to meet at least once a year to examine issues of common interest.

II. CONSULTATIVE FUNCTION OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

General cooperation

4. The Chair of the EP Conference of Committee Chairs (CCC) will be invited twice a year to the EESC Bureau to discuss general legislative cooperation.
5. At their level, the Chairs of the Parliamentary committees and the Presidents of the EESC sections shall endeavour to meet at least once a year to follow up on files that fall within the remits of their respective committees and sections.
6. Rapporteurs of the Parliament may be invited to Committee section meetings and EESC rapporteurs to Parliamentary committee meetings or hearings when these meetings or hearings relate to their files. The EP may also invite EESC rapporteurs to participate in considering draft reports in the EP committee debriefing meetings on interinstitutional negotiations, where applicable.
7. In Parliamentary committee meetings, a seat will be reserved for one member of the Committee or for an EESC staff member to be present.

The EESC's advice throughout the legislative cycle

8. Based on its Treaty-related functions, the EESC can advise the Parliament along the whole policy cycle, namely:

- in the pre-legislation phase, through the instrument of exploratory opinions;
- in the legislation phase, through Treaty-based referrals;
- in the post-legislation phase, through evaluation of policies.

Pre-legislation

9. Either before the Commission has drafted its legislative proposals, or in cases where the Parliament intends to act on its own initiative, the Parliament may call on the Committee to draft exploratory opinions. Exploratory opinions enable the various components of civil society represented within the Committee to express the expectations, concerns and needs of grass root stakeholders.

10. When a Parliamentary committee intends to draw up a report on a subject matter falling within its competence on which no referral has taken place, it may call on the Committee to draft an exploratory opinion.

11. The requests for exploratory opinions are communicated to the Committee as provided in the EP Rules of Procedure. The Committee adopts its exploratory opinion within the required deadline. In the framework of upcoming INI reports, EESC sections may make proposals for exploratory opinions to Parliamentary committees.

Legislation

12. Every year, the EP will forward to the EESC the Joint Declaration on EU legislative priorities after it is signed by the Presidents of the Parliament, the Council and the Commission. The EP will also share with the EESC information on its monitoring of the effective implementation and enforcement of the Joint Declaration.

13. At the beginning of the year, the President of the EESC may be invited to a meeting of the CCC to discuss areas of possible cooperation with regard to the legislative priorities listed in the Joint Declaration.

14. The Committee will endeavour to deliver its Treaty-based opinions on time. In doing so, it will keep into consideration the priorities and deadlines of the Parliament in the organisation of its own work. Ideally, its opinion should be available ahead of the first exchange of views in the competent Parliament committee. When setting deadlines for consultations, a degree of flexibility may be accepted, notably when the EESC can only give its opinion at the first EESC Plenary meeting following the three months deadline, so long as this does not negatively impact Parliament's programme of work.

15. In preparing its opinions, the EESC highlights the specific changes it proposes to the discussed legislative proposals and summarises its main recommendations and proposals.

16. Rapporteurs, both in the Parliament and in the Committee, are encouraged to exchange information on relevant reports and opinions prepared by their counterparts.

Post Legislation

17. The Parliament and the Committee cooperate in order to contribute effectively to better law-making and to the Better Regulation Agenda. The Committee contributes by bringing the views of organised civil society into the evidence-based process.

18. In this context, the CCC and the EESC may decide together, at the beginning of the Parliament's term and thereafter on an annual basis where appropriate, on a list of EU legislation in force and EU spending programmes on which the Committee will carry out ex-post evaluations. Ex-post evaluations, based on the EESC's own methodology, will draw specifically on information and relevant material from economic, social and civil society actors and stakeholders on how this legislation and these spending programmes work in practice, identify implementation gaps, as well as any shortcomings to be taken into account when drafting and revising legislation and EU policy.

In the absence of any such agreements, the Committee can on its own initiative draw up a list of EU legislation and EU programmes on which it proposes to carry out ex-post evaluations. It will forward this list to the CCC.

19. The Parliament and the Committee may set deadlines for finalising ex-post evaluations. Decisions on ex-post evaluations and deadlines will take into account the period needed for data collection, and the availability of Committee human, financial and other resources.

20. The results of ex-post evaluations will be forwarded to the CCC and/or Parliamentary committee in the form of opinions or evaluation reports. Should a Parliamentary committee organise a hearing, exchange of views or decide to prepare an implementation report, relevant EESC representatives will be invited to the committee meeting or meetings in order to present their findings. Implementation reports shall make reference to ex-post evaluations.

21. Ex-post evaluations will be assessed in line with the provisions of paragraph 41, or sooner at the request of one of the signatory parties.

European Semester

22. The Parliament will involve the Committee in its European Semester work. Together, they will develop the synergies between their actions and initiatives in policy areas that concern civil society the most. The Committee may be invited to give input before the formulation of the Parliament's opinions, notably on the employment guidelines and, if needed, through the economic dialogue.

23. The Committee will invite a representative of the Parliament to participate in the Committee's plenary debate on the opinions adopted in connection with the European Semester, together with the Member of the Commission.

Foresight

24. The Committee may contribute to certain Parliament's foresight activities by providing the views of civil society, as well as the expertise of its members and networks. The Parliament may support the Committee in reinforcing its foresight capacities by sharing information and experience, e.g. on existing processes or tools.

Access to research services

25. Services in charge of research and analysis on both sides will continue their cooperation and sharing of material of mutual relevance. The competent services of the European Parliament will provide research expertise and materials, including briefings, analyses and studies to Members of the EESC.

Administrative cooperation

26. Relations at administrative level will support the relations at political level in their efforts to ensure continuity and quality of cooperation, including exchange of information about the main activities or initiatives of common interest undertaken or planned, notably as to parliamentary committee hearings.

This exchange of information will allow the Committee to better anticipate and organise its own work and proceedings.

27. The planned Joint Legislative Portal or other similar inter-institutional projects should involve a contribution of the EESC and include information on its input.

28. The Parties agree to implement bilateral administrative arrangements enlisted above. Those provisions do not replace, but supplement joint actions agreed on a tripartite basis between the EP, the CoR and the EESC included in the administrative cooperation Agreement signed on 5 February 2014, where such joint actions are still applicable or relevant.

III. JOINT COOPERATION INITIATIVES

29. Where appropriate, the Parliament and the Committee could decide to jointly manage cooperation platforms or future initiatives that address issues within the Committee's competence. Where appropriate, the Committee may work closely with the Parliament's services at various levels on specific subjects. Such cooperative activities may be bilateral, consisting of knowledge-exchange and joint participation in events, and one-off initiatives.

IV. THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY

The architecture of European democracy

30. The Parliament and the Committee cooperate in order to strengthen further participation of and dialogue with civil society organisations, at both national and European levels, and to foster greater involvement of those organisations in the processes of policy-framing and the preparation of Union legislation.

31. The Parliament may make use of the work of the stakeholders' groups that have been established by the EESC to represent the various economic and social interests of organised EU society, and to foster dialogue between civil society organisations and networks, as well as between them and the European institutions.

32. Within this framework, the Parliament and the Committee commit to discuss how to establish regular coordinated actions, for:

- Structured consultation with organised civil society via the organisation of hearings, seminars, country visits and conferences. The EP may be represented at the EESC annual Civil Society Week.
- Contribution to raising awareness of the citizens' initiatives, notably through the organisation by the EESC of the annual European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Day, during which the Parliament may be represented by a Member of its bureau.

Network of national Economic and Social Councils

33. The Parliament and the Committee endeavour to foster ownership of Union policies by citizens. To that end, the Parliament welcomes the Committee's intention to pursue its efforts to involve the network of national Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions.

External dimension and cooperation with civil society outside the Union

34. The Parliament and the Committee acknowledge the need to further support the EU external action by engaging with and supporting the civil society outside the EU, notably in the enlargement and Neighbourhood countries.

35. In this context, the Committee will invite the Parliament to its meetings that have an external dimension and put at its disposal its worldwide network of civil society organisations.

36. The Parliament shall continue to invite the Committee to meetings with an external dimension that concern the civil society, such as the Joint Parliamentary Assemblies.

IV. COMMUNICATING EUROPE IN PARTNERSHIP

37. Parliament and the Committee will step up synergies in the field of communication, working together on media coverage of their activities using the available communication platforms and tools.

38. The Committee, together with its members, partner organisations and the national Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions, constitutes a key information and communication network. The Parliament will participate, whenever possible and relevant, in meetings organised by the Committee with its members, with members' host organisations, the national Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions.

39. By joint agreement, cooperation in the field of communication may take a more structured format in the run-up and follow-up to European elections, to support reciprocal efforts and outreach.

40. Cooperation with the Parliament's Liaison Offices may include support for organising the Committee's events at local level.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

41. The implementation of this Agreement will in principle be followed-up and assessed once each Parliamentary term by the Presidents or their representatives, supported by their respective Secretaries-General and relevant services.

VII. FINAL PROVISIONS

42. This Agreement does not intend to create any legal obligation between the EP and the EESC and is without prejudice to their respective autonomy in their processes, activities and responsibilities under the Treaties.

43. This Agreement repeals and replaces the previous Cooperation Agreement signed on 5 February 2014, with the exception of the provisions of the tripartite administrative cooperation Agreement signed on the same day between the EP, the CoR and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) that are still applicable or relevant.

44. This Agreement will take effect on the date on which it is signed by the Parties.

Done at Brussels, on 14 May 2024

For the European Parliament

The President



Roberta Metsola

For the European Economic and Social Committee

The President



Oliver Röpke