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Europaudvalget
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Medlemmerne af Folketingets

Europaudvalg og deres stedfortrædere

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Til underretning for Folketingets Europaudvalg vedlægges i forbindelse med regeringskonferencen forslag fra det Økonomiske og Sociale Udvalg, CONFER 4791/00.

CONFERENCE

Brussels, 24 October 2000

OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE

GOVERNMENTS

OF THE MEMBER STATES

CONFER 4791/00

LIMITE

TRANSLATION OF LETTER

from:	Mr Göke FRERICHS, President of the Economic and Social Committee
dated:	20 October 2000
to:	Mr Pierre VIMONT, President of the Group of representatives of the Governments of the Member States
Subject:	IGC 2000: {{SPA}} Proposition of the Economic and Social Committee

Sir/Madam,

On 20 September 2000 the Presidency presented, within the framework of the Conference of the representatives of Member States' governments, a memo proposing amendments to the Treaty concerning the Economic and Social Committee. The Committee is pleased to note that these proposals will ensure a wider representation of the various socio-economic components making up organised civil society (Article 257 TEC).

We agree with this approach: European integration will become more transparent and democratic if a wider range of civil society organisations than at present is represented on the Committee. We also agree entirely with the European Parliament which, in keeping with the opinion of the Commission, has stressed that the functioning of the Committee must be adapted with a view to strengthening its role as a forum for social dialogue and a relay vis-à-vis civil society. We also welcome the recent communication of the Commission on the future of structured dialogue after the expiry of the ECSC Treaty, which proposes to entrust the Committee with an additional role in the context of industrial change and enlargement.

However, we are extremely surprised by the contradiction between, on the one hand, this new approach characterised by a wider representation, a strengthened role within the framework of the social dialogue and the future civil dialogue, and a possible additional role after the expiry of the ECSC Treaty, and, on the other hand, the proposal that the number of Committee members be limited to two hundred and fifty, with Member States' quotas being reduced by one third when the initial wave of enlargement takes place (Article 258 TEC).

The number of Committee members must ensure effective representation of a wider range of civil society organisations than at present and above all should not lead to a reduced representation of the interests which constitute the very essence of the Committee, as reflected by the organisation of the Committee in three groups (employers, workers, various interests). In this respect, the number fixing each Member State's quota must continue to be a multiple of three.

I would also ask you to bear the following points in mind:

- if the aim really is to improve the role of the ESC, it is also necessary to keep a geographical balance and to ensure that the total number of members is large enough to allow Member States, and especially the smaller countries, to satisfactorily meet the needs arising from the increase in the number of organisations to be represented, while also bearing in mind that below a certain threshold it is no longer possible to ensure that a country is represented effectively;
- reducing the size of each Member State's quota by one third from the time of the first enlargement, and irrespective of the number of Member States would - if the number of new Member States was small - substantially and drastically reduce the total number of ESC members.

The Committee therefore requests that the proposal for Article 258 be revised upwards to enable it to carry out its duties effectively. To this end, the principle of equal treatment of the ESC and the COR, which has applied since the Maastricht Treaty, should be retained. The breakdown of members for the two advisory committees should remain the same.

In parallel, the Committee proposes that a declaration concerning the advisory role of the Committee, and spelling out these guidelines, be appended to the final act of the conference. A proposed draft is enclosed.

I hope that you will take due account of the Committee's point of view at the conference.

(Complementary close).

(s.) Göke FRERICHS

President of the Social and Economic Committee

PROPOSAL FOR A DECLARATION TO BE APPENDED

TO THE NICE FINAL ACT

DECLARATION

on the role of the European Economic and Social Committee

The Conference considers that the advisory role of the Economic and Social Committee should be broadened by taking advantage of its representation of the various economic and social components of organised civil society.

The Conference invites the Parliament and the Commission (i) to introduce the possibility of "exploratory" consultation of the Committee, at the pre-legislative stage, (ii) to establish the Committee as a forum for the civil dialogue which should develop between civil society organisations, and (iii) to strengthen the role of the Committee as a framework for consultation between the socio-economic partners.
