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NOTE

from:	General Secretariat of the Council
to:	Delegations
Subject:	Partial summary record of the 624th Bureau meeting and the 505th plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), held in Brussels on 17, 18 and 19 February 2015

The highlight of the 505th plenary session was the visit of Commission President, Jean-Claude JUNCKER. He pledged increased cooperation between the Commission and the EESC, notably in the context of the 2015 Work Programme to which he welcomed the EESC's contribution. He also presented his proposals and views on the European Commission's policy in the years ahead and considered that it was "la Commission de la dernière chance".

Discussion on the draft 2016 EESC budget at the Bureau meeting, including the impact of the transfer of EESC staff to the European Parliament.

The Bureau meeting and the plenary were chaired by Mr MALOSSE (GR I, FR), President of the EESC.

BUREAU MEETING

Items B1 and B2: Organisation of work and changes to the membership of Committee bodies: Draft agenda for the February plenary session and forthcoming plenary sessions

President MALOSSE announced that First Vice-President TIMMERMANS would speak before the plenary on 18 March and that VPs KATAINEN and SEFCOVIC would also take the floor during the March plenary. Concerning the EESC plenary session in April, European Council President TUSK has been invited. Ms MALMSTRÖM has already confirmed her participation. The EESC would also like to invite HR MOGHERINI.

Item B3: Legislative programme, own-initiative and exploratory opinions

The Bureau held a long discussion on the strategy concerning own-initiative opinions. President MALOSSE expressed the opinion that their number should be reduced but his position was not supported by Bureau members. The majority of speakers, led by the Groups' Presidents, considered that own-initiative opinions were an important means of expression and contribution for the Committee. A list of 14 own-initiative opinions was adopted, with the exception of two proposals from Group I which were withdrawn.

Item C1: General matters: Cooperation agreement with the Committee of the Regions

The Secretary-General reported that negotiations with the Committee of the Regions were ongoing. A more detailed report would be presented to the Bureau in March.

Item D: Budgetary matters

The Bureau discussed the draft estimates for the 2016 EESC budget, presented by the President of the Budget Group, Mr WILMS (GR II, DE), who said that the budget was in surplus, which would allow more funding for the activities of EESC members. He explained that the overall budget increase was 1,08% and included the impact of the 2015 and 2016 salary adjustments as well as the impact of the amounts kept in reserve in 2015 for implementing the cooperation agreement with the EP. He explained that the transfer of staff to the EP was taken into account in 2015 to the amount of EUR 3 135 000 (of which EUR 285 000 was in reserve), based on an estimated cost of EUR 95 000 per seconded official. However, Mr WILMS reported that, as the average cost had turned out to be only EUR 62 000 per official, part of the reduction needed to be reverted in 2016. He indicated that the application of all parameters resulted in an overall increase of EUR 611 279 (+0.97%), and that the impact of the reversion of part of the reduction for transferred staff corresponded to an additional increase of EUR 990 000 (+1.58%).

Mr MALOSSE explained that the surplus from the staff transfer would be used for members' activities. He said that, as the European Parliament had asked EESC to prepare impact assessments for it, this should be taken into account in the budget. Ms O'NEILL (GR III, UK) raised issues concerning staff transfers, especially on the exact modalities and perspectives, the possibilities for the transferred staff to return to the EESC, and the real impact. Mr WILMS replied that the return procedures and impact were still to be clarified.

The Bureau would take a decision on the 2016 EESC budget at its March meeting.

PLENARY

Item 5: Presentation of the European Commission's multiannual political guidelines by Jean-Claude JUNCKER, President of the European Commission

President JUNCKER presented his proposals and views on the European Commission's policy in the years ahead. He deplored the gap between the EU and European citizens and considered that it was "la Commission de la dernière chance". He said that the EU should only focus its action on the essential issues and be modest and less ambitious on the less important ones.

President JUNCKER outlined the main directions and the priority actions of the European Commission, namely: to deepen the EMU and to achieve a functioning internal market; to establish Digital Europe and the Energy Union; to adopt TTIP without concessions on EU values; and to prioritise the social dimension of Europe. He also recalled the ambition to strengthen investments via the EU Investment Plan, as a means to create jobs and growth. President JUNCKER underlined the "absolute urgency" of boosting investments and stressed the important Member States' role in this regard.

Mr JUNCKER evaluated very positively the quality of the EESC's opinions and its contribution to the [2015 Commission work programme](#).

In the subsequent debate, EESC Members welcomed President Juncker's determination to involve the social partners and civil society in the reforms. The three EESC Groups (Employers, Workers and Various Interests), via their Presidents, stressed the urgency of shaping a sustainable economic recovery. Mr KRAWCYK (GR I, PL) raised the issue of the importance of entrepreneurial freedom, while Mr DASSIS (GR II, EL) and Mr JAHIER (GR III, IT) stressed the necessary EU social dimension and the need to put an end to austerity. Speakers also raised the issues of sustainable development (Mr RIBBE (GR III, DE)), the fight against poverty (Mr HENCKS (GR II, LU)), and consumer protection (Mr PEDAGO LIZ (GR III, PT)).
