Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the:

— **'Proposal for a Council Directive on the marketing of vegetable seed' (consolidated version),**

— **'Proposal for a Council Directive on the marketing of cereal seed' (consolidated version), and**

— **'Proposal for a Council Directive on the common catalogue of agricultural plant species' (consolidated version)**

(96/C 153/14)

On 30 January 1996, the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 43 and 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposals.

The Section for Agriculture and Fisheries, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 8 February 1996. The Rapporteur was Mr Bento Gonçalves.

At its 333rd Plenary Session (meeting of 28 February 1996), the Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following Opinion.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Commission proposal aims to systematize the consolidation of the various legislative texts concerning the marketing of seed in the European Union, in response to the Community authorities' request for simplification and transparency of Community law.

Following this request, in April 1987, the Commission decided to proceed with the consolidation of legal acts after the tenth amendment at the latest, to make for clearer Community legislation which would be more readily understood by the user.

2. General remarks

2.1. The new consolidated Directives will consequently replace the various previous texts which have already been the subject of ESC Opinions. The content of the texts will remain unchanged. Amendments introduced during consolidation are merely a matter of form.

2.2. The consolidated Directive will provide a valuable basis for any legal amendments which might be necessary in the future.

3. Specific remarks

3.1. The first Commission proposal aims to systematize the consolidation of the legislative texts concerning the marketing of vegetable seed [95/0320(CNS)]. Seed production plays an important role in EU agriculture, so improving seed quality helps to increase Community vegetable-growing productivity, thanks to Member State implementation of common regulations which are as stringent as possible.

3.2. Proposal 95/0321(CNS) aims to systematize the consolidation of legal texts concerning the marketing of cereal seed. Satisfactory results in cereal cultivation depend largely on the use of suitable seed. Increased cereal growing productivity in the Community will be obtained by Member State implementation of common regulations, which will be as stringent as possible, thus ensuring top quality seed.

3.3. Proposal 95/0322(CNS) aims to use national catalogues to create a common catalogue of varieties of agricultural plant species for the following: beetroot, forage plants, cereals, potato plants and oil and fibre plants, with a view to improving market clarity and logic.

3.4. The proposed Directive does not apply to varieties for which it has been proved that the seed or plant are meant for export to third countries.

4. Conclusions

4.1. The Committee endorses the European Commission proposal for:

— the Council Directive on the marketing of vegetable seed;

— the Council Directive on the marketing of cereal seed; and

— the Council Directive on the common catalogue of varieties of agricultural plant species.

Done at Brussels, 28 February 1996.

The President
of the Economic and Social Committee
Carlos FERRER

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) amending Regulation (EEC) No 2075/92 on the common organization of the market in raw tobacco, and fixing the guarantee thresholds for leaf tobacco by group of tobacco varieties for the 1996 and 1997 harvests' [1]

(96/C 153/15)

On 18 January 1996, the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 43 and 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

The ESC decided to appoint Mr Zarkinos as Rapporteur-General responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject.

At its 333rd Plenary Session (meeting of 29 February 1996), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion *nem. con.*, with 24 abstentions.

1. Introduction

The Commission is here proposing to the Council the fixing of the guarantee thresholds for leaf tobacco for the 1996 and 1997 harvests in order to allow producers to plan their production in good time.

It also proposes amending the basic Regulation (EEC) 2075/92 in order to allow Member States to transfer certain guarantee threshold quantities from one group of varieties to other groups of varieties without financial consequences.

The Commission's aim is to introduce a degree of flexibility into the administration of guarantee thresholds, to take account of unpredictable trends in market conditions.

2. General comments

2.1. Tobacco is an annual crop and its production process starts in winter with the leasing of land, the supply of equipment and the preparation of seed drills. Since the regime for this sector assists production of a fixed quantity per producer, it is clear that the producer can plan his production and avoid uneconomic activities and pointless expense only when he knows what his quota is. By the same token, any negotiations with a view to crop contracts between producers and dealers presuppose knowledge of producers' quotas.

2.2. The Committee has ascertained that for the 1995 financial year the producers were informed of their quotas very late (end of May). This led to protests from the producers and their organizations, which in turn led the Council and the Commission to admit the need for allocation of quotas to take place in good time.

2.3. The Committee takes the view that the Commission proposal on the guarantee thresholds for 1996 and 1997 is a step in the right direction, but the delay for the 1996 financial year is now unavoidable. Regulation 1066/95 lays down that the Member States shall publish their confirmations of quotas not later than 31 January of the year of the harvest concerned.

The Commission proposal was submitted on 27 November 1995; however, owing to an unfortunate delay in the decision-making procedure at European Union level, for yet another year the quotas will be announced late, with negative effects on the producers and the sector in general.

[1] OJ No C 30, 3. 2. 1996, p. 6.