



# European Commission Public Consultations



*Business Support on Your Doorstep*

**Enterprise Europe Network London**

**December 2008**



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## 1. Introduction

Public consultation is a process whereby the public's opinion is sought on forthcoming legislation and on proposals affecting them. The European Commission has a long tradition of consulting interested parties throughout its legislative process. It began in the 1980s as a 'reality check' for new legislation and has, since then, developed into a standard part of any draft proposal from the Commission. The responses provide the Commission with important feedback and insights into how the proposed legislation would be received and whether it is practically workable. As such, it presents an excellent opportunity for businesses and other parties to influence EU policy at an early stage.

Apart from public consultations, there is a specific consultation framework where the Commission is required, according to the Treaties, to consult the two institutional advisory bodies: the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. These specific consultations where the Commission is obliged to follow certain procedures will not, however, be dealt with in this factsheet.

## 2. EC public consultations – minimum standards

The Treaties stipulate that "the Commission should [...] consult widely before proposing legislation, and, wherever appropriate, publish consultation documents"<sup>1</sup>, but it leaves for the Commission to decide how to do it. Previously, the Directorates-General, i.e. the Commission departments, used different methods for consulting relevant interest groups. From 2002, however, general principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties were adopted in order to ensure consistency. The principles and standards are not legally binding but are applied on a routine basis; in particular when the proposed legislation will result in a substantial economic, environmental and/or social impact on a specific sector or on major interested parties. The following minimum standards apply:<sup>2</sup>

- clear and concise communication,
- adequate coverage, i.e. target groups should include those affected by the policy and those who will be involved in implementation or have a direct interest in the policy,
- publication on a single access point: the 'Your Voice in Europe' web portal<sup>3</sup>,
- sufficient time for responses – at least 8 weeks,
- acknowledgement and feedback; receipt of responses and publication of results.

As regards feedback, the Commission intends to give feedback on all consultations; however, it does normally not take the form of individual feedback statements but is provided through an official Commission document.

## 3. The EC consultation process

Consultations of the European Commission are published on the web portal 'Your Voice in Europe', which is available at <http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations>. For every published consultation, the following information should be available online:

- summary of the context, scope and objectives of the consultation,
- description of specific issues open for discussion or questions with particular importance for the Commission,
- description of target groups and which stakeholders they are particularly interested in receiving input from,
- details for any hearings, meetings or conferences where applicable,
- explanation of the Commission's procedure for dealing with contributions; expected feedback,
- details on the next stages in the development of the policy,
- references or attachments to related documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> Amsterdam Treaty, Protocol no 7, Article 2.

<sup>2</sup> COM(2002)704 final.

<sup>3</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations>

The screenshot shows the 'Your Voice in Europe' website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Your Voice in Europe' logo, a language dropdown set to 'English', and a search bar. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with 'European Commission > Your Voice in Europe > Home > Consultations' and a 'Contact | Search on EUROPA' link. A main banner features the word 'Consultations' in a stylized font over a background of people's faces. Below the banner, a text box invites users to 'Take part in shaping European policy by responding to one of our consultations - we are very interested in hearing your views and learning from your experience.' The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column, titled 'Consultations by policy activity', lists various policy areas such as 'General and institutional affairs', 'Agriculture', 'Budget', 'Competition', 'Consumers', 'Culture', 'Customs', 'Development', 'Economic affairs', 'Education', 'Employment & social affairs', 'Energy', 'Enlargement', 'Enterprise', 'Environment', 'Equal opportunities', 'External relations', 'Fisheries and aquaculture', 'Food safety', 'Foreign & security policy', 'Humanitarian aid', 'Information society', 'Internal market', 'Justice & home affairs', and 'Public health'. The right column, titled 'Recent public consultations', provides an overview of 'Open consultations' and 'Closed consultations'. It includes a table of open consultations with columns for 'Title & description', 'Policy field', 'Target group', and 'Closing date'. The table lists several consultations, including 'EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) - Consultation on Aviation Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV)', 'Consultation on the early challenges regarding the "Internet of Things"', 'Freedom, Security and Justice: What will be the future?', and 'Strategic choices for young Europeans - An EU-wide public consultation on the future of youth policy'. Each entry includes a 'More information' link. At the bottom of the table, there are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and others.

To take part in an open consultation, go to the web portal above, click on the relevant consultation and follow the instructions. Respondents will be asked to fill out an online questionnaire or to submit comments and general remarks by email. A consultation document containing the draft legislation on which comments are sought will be available on the website.

Closed consultations, including all responses received and information on follow-up measures, are also publicly available on this website. The following are examples of closed consultations:

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Consultation</b>
Information society:	EU Strategy for International Co-operation on Information and Communication Technologies (closing date: 29.09.2007)
Enterprise:	Consultation on the elements for a horizontal legislative approach to technical harmonisation (closing date: 28.07.2006)
Environment:	Public consultation on the review of the EU strategy to CO2 emissions and improve fuel efficiency from cars (closing date: 21.08.2006)
Internal market:	Public consultation on Postal Services (closing date: 27.01.2006)
Food safety:	Community Action Plan on Animal Welfare and Protection (closing date: 20.12.2005)
External relations:	Consultation on Thematic Programme for co-operation with industrialised countries and territories (TPIC) under the future Financial Perspectives (closing date: 07.12.2005)
Customs:	Customs tariff and chemical classification: Five minutes to tailor our services to your needs (closing date: 02.12.2005)
Air transport:	Public consultation on "Airport capacity, efficiency and safety in Europe" (closing date: 30.11.2005)

## 4. UK consultations

The UK government has a similar tradition of consulting the public during its legislative process. Government departments like the Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and others all carry out public consultations on a regular basis. Similarly to the European Commission's minimum standards, all UK consultations follow a code of practice. The code of practice is there to ensure consistency and a common standard for consultations across government. It states that plenty of time should be allowed for each stage of the process, that the information is simple, clear and concise, that it includes a summary including the questions and target groups it wishes to address, that it is widely distributed, that answers are analysed fairly and that the results are made widely available.

## 5. Useful contacts and websites

### **Your Voice in Europe web portal**

All EC consultations addressed to the public should be published here.

**W:** <http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations>

### **Directgov**

A full list of UK government consultation websites is found here, as well as tips on taking part in consultations.

**W:** [www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/UKgovernment/PublicConsultations/](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/UKgovernment/PublicConsultations/)

### **Businesslink**

Businesslink lists open consultations of interest to businesses in the UK.

**W:** [www.businesslink.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/consultations)

### **London Innovation Network**

London Innovation Network, which is the London-based Enterprise Europe Network, publishes a fortnightly bulletin on EU News and Funding. Apart from press releases, new EC legislation, funding opportunities and events, the bulletin includes the latest consultations issued by the EC or the UK government. To subscribe, please email to [europa@londonchamber.co.uk](mailto:europa@londonchamber.co.uk). The bulletin is also available online. **W:** [www.london-innovation.org/eunewsandfunding](http://www.london-innovation.org/eunewsandfunding)



This factsheet was produced by the Enterprise Europe Network London team at London Chamber of Commerce. The Enterprise Europe Network London brings together GLE, London Chamber of Commerce and London Technology Network. The Enterprise Europe Network London is funded by the European Commission and the London Development Agency.

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[www.een-london.co.uk](http://www.een-london.co.uk)

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