



Interview



Conny Reuter

President of Social Platform

Achieving Social Justice and Participatory Democracy in Europe

Social Platform was established in 1995 and brings together around forty European non-governmental organisations, federations and networks which are working to build an inclusive society and promote the social dimension of the European Union. It is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 43 pan-European networks of NGOs, Social Platform campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives. Social Platform and its members are committed to advancing the principles of equality, solidarity and non-discrimination, as well as the promotion of respect for fundamental rights, within Europe and in particular the European Union.

The members of Social Platform represent thousands of organisations, associations and voluntary groups at local, regional, national and European level representing the interests of a wide range of civil society. These include organisations of women, older people, persons with disabilities, the unemployed, those affected

by poverty, gays and lesbians, young people, children and families. Member organisations also include those campaigning on issues such as social justice, homelessness, life-long learning, health and reproductive rights and racism.

EUROPE III - Social Platform was established in 1995. What are the main achievements and your priorities for the future?

Social Platform and its members work hard in many areas to push for EU laws and policies that improve the lives of people across the EU, from doing public campaigning to speaking at high-level events like the informal meetings of EU employment ministers. We're proud that last June, for the first time, heads of state agreed to make combating poverty one of the five EU priorities for the next ten years. We're also pleased that the EP's recent votes on the anti-discrimination and maternity leave directives supported most of our proposals, and we're making good progress on protecting social services from the impact of the single market.

EUROPE III - Regarding the EU financial perspectives 2014-2020, do you think that they meet the demands of the CSO members of Social Platform with whom you work?

The Europe 2020 strategy calls for "smart, sustainable and inclusive" objectives, and as such we anticipate that one third of its budget should go towards inclusive priorities. We also expect that the financial perspectives will include the Lisbon treaty transversal equality and social clauses 8, 9 and 10 in their general principles and the subsequent legal instruments. Finally, we hope that the new legal financial instruments (e.g. structural funds) will allocate sufficient funding for EU social inclusion policies, and will guarantee that all other financial programmes reflect the inclusive pillar of the Europe 2020 strategy: for example to ensure that agricultural, research and innovation programmes are developed in an inclusive manner.

EUROPE III - Last year, the Commission issued Europe 2020, the EU's growth strategy for the coming decade

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Citizens' Agora "Crisis and Poverty" Brussels 27-28 January 2011

Editorial



Maureen O'NEILL (UK)

Vice-President of Group III

The AGORA organised by the European Parliament in collaboration with the EESC considered the EU Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion by bringing together representatives of civil society and people experiencing poverty from across the Member States. The aim of the Citizens' AGORA as developed by the European Parliament is intended to be an **additional tool for dialogue** on a specific topic between local actors, the European Parliament and other EU institutions.

There was passionate debate in the three workshops which included presentations from members of the EESC on topics covering the economic and financial crisis, migration flows and challenges to the European Social Model. The aim was to arrive at concrete proposals for action by the European Parliament. Mr. Libor Roucek and Ms Isabelle Durant, Vice

Presidents of the EU Parliament received a range of proposals from the participants for consideration and action by the Parliament which included, for example, **calls to monitor the impact of austerity measures to prevent further poverty**; to ensure that the approach in 2020 Strategy had a balance between economic and social measures and to encourage better co-operation between the EU parliament and national parliaments in addressing the issue of poverty.

There was a **very strong sense of indignation** felt by individuals and the organisations involved in combating poverty in regard to the social impact of the crisis and the seriousness and extent of poverty within the EU. It was felt that people who had no responsibility for the financial crisis were the ones who were disproportionately affected.

Whilst this was the last major event of the EU Year against Poverty it must be seen as the opening of a new chapter under the 2020 Strategy with the commitment to reduce poverty by 20% and the introduction of a Platform against Poverty.

The EESC together with civil society organisations and the social partners will need to ensure that progress is monitored and to influence change and political decisions to ensure that at least reduction in poverty becomes a reality whilst taking appropriate opportunities to press for more ambitious measures in the future.

More on this event can be found on our website: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-adora-crisis-poverty>

setting ambitious objectives on employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate/energy to be reached by 2020. What do you think about the involvement of CSO in the conception of the strategy and its implementation?

Europe 2020 itself states that it "should be implemented in partnership with representatives of civil society". We asked all EU heads of state how they involved CSOs in setting up the Europe 2020 objectives at national level. Unfortunately few of them replied and we're concerned about the involvement of civil society in the process.

EUROPE III - In January 2010 you published a document on "How to establish an effective dialogue between the EU and civil society organisations" (http://cms.horus.be/files/99907/MediaArchive/Policies/Participatory_democracy/SocialPlatform_EffectiveCivilDialogue.pdf),

result of a process started in 2007. Could you provide us some highlights of this work? What are the main results of your recommendations until now?

Our current focus is on trying to implement one of our proposals from this paper: establishing a European Statute for European associations. Last November, the EP launched a written declaration (www.europeanstatuteswrittendeclaration.eu) calling on the Commission to table three proposals for European statutes for associations, to give them political recognition and simplify administrative procedures. We invite all our partners to join the informal "European Alliance for the Statute of the European Association" (EASEA - www.easea.eu), which we're a member of, and to urge your MEPs to sign the declaration!

EUROPE III - You intervened in the closing session of the Citizens' Agora on Crisis and Poverty organised by the

European Parliament on 27-28 January in Brussels. What are your views in this type of experience of dialogue with CSO?

In principle, the Agora is a good example of participatory democracy. It's a complementary process giving citizens the chance to express their concerns directly to MEPs. This model should be true for all policy processes. For example, it's clear that people experiencing poverty, and the CSOs that support them, should be at the heart of developing EU policies – not only during the Agora, but at all points in the process.

socialplatform

To find out more about this organisation, please click here: <http://www.socialplatform.org/>

Highlights of the January 2011 EESC Plenary Session

Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Mr Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Promoting free movement of public documents and recognition of the effects of civil status records" – INT/559.

Mr Thomas PALMGREN (FI) will chair the study group for the opinion on: "Reaping the benefits of electronic invoicing for Europe" – INT/560.

Mr Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Cooperation between national authorities responsible for the enforcement of consumer protection laws" – INT/561.

Mr Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Developing a people-orientated, grassroots approach to internal market policy" – INT/OMU/563.

Mrs Reine-Claude MADER (FR) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Future of VAT: towards a simpler, more robust and efficient VAT system." – ECO/293.

Mr Etele BARATH (HU) is the Co-Rapporteur for the opinion on: "European Union Strategy for Danube Region" – ECO/294.

Mr Viliam PÁLENÍK (SK) will chair the study group for the opinion on: "Removing cross-border tax obstacles for EU citizens" – ECO/295.

Mr Carlos TRIAS-PINTO (ES) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Financial education and responsible consumption" – ECO/297.

Mr Carlos TRIAS-PINTO (ES) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "How to involve Civil Society in Financial Regulation" – ECO/298.

Mr Niko van NIEKERK (NL) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Monitoring the GDP and beyond process – The involvement of civil society in the process of choosing complementary indicators to GDP" – ECO/301.

Mr Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO) is the Co-Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Strategy for the effective implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights by the European Union" – SOC/401.

Mr Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe" – SOC/403.

Mr Pavel TRANTINA (CZ) will chair the study group for the opinion on: "An Agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment" – SOC/404.

Mrs Maureen O'NEILL (UK) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: a European framework for social and territorial cohesion" – SOC/405.

Mr Eugen LUCAN (RO) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Homelessness" – SOC/408.

Dr Renate HEINISCH (DE) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Making post-secondary Vocational Education and Training more attractive" – SOC/409.

Mr Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "The economic crisis, education, and the labour market" – SOC/410.

Mrs Jillian van TURNHOUT (IE) is the Rapporteur for the complementary opinion on: "Preventive measures for the protection of children against sexual abuse" – SOC/412.

Mr Thomas PALMGREN (FI) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Opportunities and challenges for a more competitive European woodworking and furniture sector" – CCMI/088.

Mr Ludvík JÍROVEC (CZ) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "The perspectives for sustainable employment in Rail, rolling stock and infra producers, how the industrial change will influence European employment and competence base" – CCMI/089.

Mr Corrado ROSSITTO (IT) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Raw materials initiative - putting the strategy into practice" – CCMI/091.

Mr Lutz RIBBE (DE) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Reforming the EU's sustainable development strategy" – NAT/SDO/498.

Mr Pedro NARRO (ES) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "The future of Europe's young farmers" – NAT/500.

Mr Richard ADAMS (UK) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "The development of Regional areas for the management of fish stocks and the control of fishing" – NAT/501.

Mr Roman HAKEN (CZ) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "The LEADER programme and its principles as a tool for development not only in rural areas" – NAT/502.

Mrs Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Contractual relations in the milk and milk products sector" – NAT/503.

Mr Richard ADAMS (UK) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Organic production and labelling of organic products Contractual relations in the milk and milk products sector" – NAT/506.

Mr Seppo KALLIO (FI) is the Rapporteur, working alone, for the opinion on: "Financing of the common agricultural policy" – NAT/507.

Mr Nikolaos LIOLIOS (EL) is the Rapporteur, working alone, for the opinion on: "Scrutiny by Member States of transactions forming part of the system of financing by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund" – NAT/508.



Mr Pedro NARRO (ES) is the Rapporteur, working alone, for the opinion on: "Common organisation of agricultural markets and on specific provisions for certain agricultural products (Single CMO Regulation)" – NAT/510.

Mr Eugen LUCAN (RO) will chair the study group for the opinion on: "Control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances" – NAT/511.

Mr Thierry LIBAERT (FR) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Energy efficiency: best practices and technological innovation" – TEN/450.

Mr Carlos PEREIRA MARTINS (PT) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Single European Sky II (SES II)" – TEN/451.

Prof. Gerd WOLF (DE) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Cloud computing - Why and how should Europe get ready" – TEN/452.

Mr Francisco SILVA (PT) is the Co-Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "EU-Chile relations" – REX/324.

Mr Miguel Ángel CABRA DE LUNA (ES) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Social Economy in Latin America – (EESC contribution to the 2012 meeting of EESC-Latin America civil society organisations)" – REX/325.

Mrs Jane MORRICE (UK) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "The role of the European Union in peace building in external relations: best practice and perspectives" – REX/326.

Mr Roberto CONFALONIERI (IT) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Development of renewable energy in neighbouring areas with a high renewable energy potential and the economic and social impacts on such regions" – REX/329.

Mr Pedro NARRO (ES) is the Rapporteur for the information report on: "Rural development and employment in the Euromed region (EESC contribution to the next Euromed summit of ESCs and similar institutions)" – REX/330.

Mrs Evelyne PICHENOT (FR) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Trade, Growth and World Affairs - Trade Policy as a core component of the EU's 2020 strategy" – REX/331.

Mr Michael SMYTH (UK) is the Rapporteur, working alone, for the opinion on: "Annual Growth Survey: advancing the EU's comprehensive response to the crisis" – EUROPE 2020.

The full listing of membership of the study groups for the new work may be consulted here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3-new-study-groups>



News from civil society organisations close to Group III

Consumer Rights Directive 'under repair' in European Parliament



On 2 February 2011, BEUC issued a press release that broadly welcomed the endorsement by the European Parliament whilst, BEUC says that it remains unfortunate that the adopted text would be detrimental for consumers in off-premises contracts and that the Parliament has not taken the opportunity to strengthen protection on frequently encountered issues with legal guarantees.

To read the full text of the PR, click here: <http://docshare.beuc.org/docs/1/PJHOKJOANACPIBEJIPONADENPDWY9DBDC39DW3571KM/BEUC/docs/DLS/2011-00087-01-E.pdf>

Copa-Cogeca highlights key role of Agriculture in EU Economy in Maintaining Jobs



On 31 January 2011, COPA COGECA issued a press release informing of a high level meeting that took place on that day with EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso, where they highlighted the huge role that the EU agriculture sector plays in the economy, employing almost 30 million people and maintaining growth in the rural areas in the EU.

To read the full text of the PR and see other news, please go to: <http://www.copa-cogeca.eu/Main.aspx?page=HomePage>

To read more about this event, please go to: http://www.edf-feph.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=13855&thebloc=26115

UEAPME elects a new President, Loek Hermans



The newly elected President of UEAPME, Loek Hermans, from the Netherlands, took office at the beginning of the year. Commenting on the priorities for his mandate, Mr Hermans stressed the importance of a close cooperation with the Secretariat to tackle the many challenges faced by SMEs and their representative organisations.



Public consultation on Directive 2005/36/EC

On 2 February CEPLIS, for the information of its members, published on its website the European Commission document on the public consultation on the Directive related to the Recognition of the Professional Qualifications (2005/36/EC)

The EEB welcomes the MEPs vote for ambitious e-waste management



In a press release dated 3 February 2011, the European Environmental Bureau welcomed the outcome of the recent vote in European Parliament on the revision of the WEEE Directive.

To read the full text of the PR and see other news, please go to: <http://www.eeb.org/index.cfm/news-events/news/meps-vote-for-ambitious-e-waste-management/>



Stakeholders urge EU institutions to support the "Third Industrial Revolution"

In a joint press release issued on 1 February 2011, UEAPME and Co-operatives Europe highlighted a recent gathering where the Environment Committee of the European Parliament and representatives of the five major political groups in the EP joined with Europe's main associations representing small and medium-sized companies (UEAPME), consumers' interests (BEUC), cooperatives (Cooperatives Europe) and the Foundation on Economic Trends in a call for a "Third Industrial Revolution" ahead of the European Council's summit devoted to energy.

To read the full PR, click here: http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/110201_joint_pr_third_industrial_revolution.pdf



2011 is the European Year of Volunteering

In the Editorial of its January 2011 newsletter, COFACE states that a recent study gave a rough estimate of 92 to 94 million adults involved in volunteering in the EU. According to the study, this means that around 22-23 per cent of Europeans aged over 15 years are engaged in voluntary work. However, there are major differences between Member States, due also to the different definitions given to the word.

You can read the full text of the Editorial here: <http://coface-eu.org/en/Newsletter/2011/E-Newsletter-ndeg1-January-2011/>



Strong commitments from the Commission: time to take responsibility

The EDF has published information on its website about an address given by Commission Vice-President Viviane Reding to the Disability Intergroup at the European Parliament, which took place short before the entry into force of the UN Convention on 22 January. On the podium with Mrs Reding was Group III member and EDF President Yannis Vardakastanis along with the President of the Intergroup Adam Kósa. The ongoing work of the disability movement was reinforced by Ms Reding's commitments and the European Disability Forum will continue to work hard to ensure that the European institutions will now deliver.

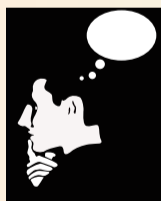


European Statutes for Associations - the time is now!

On Thursday 3 February 2011, The EYF launched a campaign asking young people to lobby their MEPs to sign written declaration 84/2010 to establish European statutes for associations.

To read more about this event, please go to: http://www.youthforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=25&Itemid=30&lang=en

Quote of the month...



"Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent."

Victor Hugo (1802 - 1885)
French poet, playwright, novelist, essayist, visual artist, statesman and human rights activist

OUR GROUP'S STRENGTH



The **SMEs, Crafts and Professions Category** met on 26 January 2011. Group III members, **Thomas Palmgren (FI)** was elected as Spokesperson for the **SMEs** sector of the category and **Carlos Pereira Martins (PT)**, Spokesperson for the **Professions** sector.



The **Farmers' Category** met on 9 February 2011. Group III member **Yves Somville (BE)** was re-elected as the Spokesperson, by acclamation.



The **Consumers' & Environment Category** will meet on 25 February 2011. Following the election of the Spokesperson, Mario Campli, Group III members and President of the NAT section will have an exchange of views on environmental issues under discussion in the section. The members will also discuss, amongst other issues, the draft agenda for European Consumers' Day, which will be held on Friday 18 March 2011 in Budapest, Hungary.



The next meeting of the **Social Economy Category** is due to take place on Tuesday 11 May 2011, when the Spokesperson, **Miguel Ángel Cabra De Luna (ES)** will present the draft work programme 2011-2012 and outline strategies for forging closer links and synergies with the EU institutions (European Parliament Social Economy Intergroup and relevant DGs in the Commission) and key stakeholders (such as Social Economy Europe and other key organisations from the sector). The members may also look at ways of establishing an exchange of views and dialogue on the Social Economy with the forthcoming Polish Presidency.

More information on the work of the categories can be found on our website (<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3>), by contacting the spokespersons of the categories, or the Secretariat of Group III at: gr3@eesc.europa.eu.

Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 19-20 January 2011 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.



Michael SMYTH (UK) – INT/527 “Corporate governance in financial institutions and remuneration policies” (EESC opinion 62/2011)

In this opinion the EESC sets out its considered responses to the lengthy list of questions posed in the Commission's Green Paper. The questions deal with eight key aspects of the governance of financial institutions ranging from the performance of boards of directors, the performance of supervisory authorities, through the management of risk, conflicts of interest, the role of shareholders through to the vexed question of the remuneration of directors. **The EESC welcomes the intent behind the Commission's Green Paper but notes some definitional shortcomings in its content, particularly on the precise definition of corporate governance which the Committee believes should be more robust, and on the differences in board structures between the Anglo Saxon and Continental systems. The Green paper is also relatively parsimonious in its treatment of the needs of consumers.** Consumers of financial services have also been hit very hard by the effects of poor governance across the financial system. In terms of remuneration policy the EESC has already expressed its general views in a number of recent opinions. In short, the Committee believes that remuneration policy should not just be about those at the top of financial institutions but also about remuneration at all levels.



Pedro NARRO (ES) – NAT/483 “Fruit juices and certain similar products intended for human consumption” (EESC opinion 68/2011)

The EESC supports the European Commission's initiative to amend Directive 2001/112 for the second time to make it comply with the Codex Alimentarius for fruit juices and nectars. **However, the EESC regrets that the proposal for a Directive omits the addition of up to 10% mandarin orange juice to orange juice in the section on authorised ingredients.** The Codex Alimentarius rules, with which the Directive aims to comply, authorises this technique which is widely used at international level and should thus be included in the text of the Directive.



Gabriel SARRÓ IPARRAGUIRE (ES) - NAT/484 “Transitional technical measures/ Conservation of fisheries resources” (EESC 69/2011)

The EESC endorses the text of the proposal for a regulation. **However**, in relation to paragraph 1b)i) of the Sole Article, the EESC considers that the European Parliament and **the Council should consider also extending the time limit for the Member States to 1 October 2011, to enable their relevant scientific institutions to present their scientific reports on fishing at depths greater than 600 metres in ICES zones VIII, IX and X.**



Eugen LUCAN (RO) - NAT/486 “Distribution of food products to the most deprived persons in the Union” (EESC opinion 70/2011)

The EESC considers that the scheme for food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Union clearly demonstrates the promotion of economic development of the food product market and European values (particularly the principle of solidarity) among the most disadvantaged social groups in the EU. Guaranteeing the supply of food to all EU citizens, especially deprived groups, must remain one of the fundamental objectives of the EU's agricultural policy. **The EESC believes that only strong and lasting economic development of agricultural policy can support the most deprived social groups in the EU and is in favour of maintaining the scheme for food distribution to the most deprived people in the EU and financing it on a permanent basis from the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) budget.** Given the scale of the phenomenon of food poverty, which affects over 43 million European citizens, and the positive impact of the scheme over time on the most deprived social groups, the EESC believes that the scheme needs a permanent and stable budget. Therefore, the Committee calls on the competent authorities in the Member States, when determining groups of deprived people, to take account of databases of people who are not included in official statistics; this information is generally available in the statistics collated by NGOs and charities. **The EESC believes that NGOs and charities which provide food aid along with healthcare and social assistance should be given financial support.**



Krzysztof PATER (PL) - SOC/386 “Towards adequate, sustainable and safe European pension systems” (EESC opinion 72/2011)

In this opinion, the Committee whilst recognising that the Member States are free to define and fully responsible for defining their social security systems, nonetheless, believes that a coordinated EU-level approach to pensions can contribute to coherence and ensure that national pension systems are in line with the social and employment pillars of the Europe 2020 strategy. **The EESC considers that the proposals made by the Commission based essentially on demographics and 50-year projections, fail to take into account the fact that the effects of the crisis on pension schemes owe more to the lack of jobs and investment than to demography.** A mere rise in legal retirement age could push millions of elderly people below the poverty line, particularly women. What is needed is to increase the effective retirement age up to the existing legal retirement age using initiatives to foster extended working life, flanked by effective growth and employment policies and a real “active ageing” policy. **Automatic adjustment mechanisms for retirement age, based either, on longer life expectancy, or demographic change, are assessed as dangerous for society as a whole and therefore not supported by the EESC.** Both Pay-As-You-Go and funded schemes are affected by the current economic crisis but in a different way. The financial crisis and its consequences show that funded mandatory pension schemes are exposed to specific financial risks. Nevertheless, Pay-as-You-Go pension schemes are affected as well by economic crisis and ageing, due to the reduction of the aggregated wage sum. **The EESC believes that Pay-As-You-Go mandatory schemes must continue to play a fundamental role in assuring future pensions and therefore special attention should be devoted to them.**

In conclusion, the Committee reaffirms that pensions are not, as stated in the Green Paper, a “reward” but rather a form of deferred wage or saving, irrespective of the type of system. Pensioners are a very important socio-economic category and should not be seen as a burden but a key economic player comprising on average 25% of the population, who fuel global demand.

NOTE: The complete texts of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's website: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.opinions-search>

News from Group III

“What are the prospects for Participatory Democracy in Europe?”

On 22 March 2011, Group III will host an important seminar under the above title. In a rapidly changing world, it should be noted that Group III has worked doggedly and consistently for well over ten years in pursuance of an important objective, the nucleus of which has been recently concretised in Article 11 of the new Lisbon Treaty. It is felt that now is an opportune moment in time to define the outline and the details of a new objective, which intersects with the implementation of Article 11 and the changed context and practice of civil dialogue at EU level. This seminar is intended to be a starting point for structured work on civil dialogue over the next two years and has three main objectives and an eventual goal in mind:

- recall what has been done so far
- put in place a work strategy for the future, re-launching the new phase following the adoption of Article 11
- outline the stages of a shared commitment within Group III

Looking to the future, we have given our goal the short title: “Second European convention of organised civil society” (following on from a similar successful event held at the EESC in 1999). Moreover, a preparatory phase for this could involve an exploratory opinion on the implementing provisions of the first two indents of Article 11.

Major players and various representatives of organised civil society will be invited to attend the event. It is also intended to compile and present a compendium of the EESC's thinking on civil dialogue and participatory democracy over the last ten years, from Contessa Beatrice Rangoni Machiavelli (President of the EESC, 1998-2000) to the current EESC President, Staffan Nilsson, as an aid to establishing a common basis for all the ‘old’ and ‘new’ members for, among other things, dialogue with CSOs close to Group III.

Group III members in the spotlight playing a key role



Arno Metzler, Vice-president of Group III

Dear readers,

Since October, in my capacity as vice-president of Group III, I have been working more closely than before in a team with Luca Jahier, Maureen O'Neill and Jillian van Turnhout on the organisational aspects of our work and its content. I should like to thank you for the trust you have placed in me.

After 8 years as a member, I felt that it was high time I made a contribution to organising the EESC's work. I learned very quickly that, with the best will in the world, there is no magic wand when it comes to making improvements – even in Group III. Budgetary constraints and formal rules as well as the Group's diversity are all barriers to rash ideas.

Up until now, my professional background has led me to focus on competition law, financial framework planning and new procedures for European coordination, together with the internal market and policy for small and medium-sized businesses. In my home country, I am the Chief Executive of the German Federal Association of Liberal Professions, which is the umbrella organisation for all members of the liberal professions in Germany, and I also work as a lawyer with a wide remit for small and medium-sized business. The liberal professions in Germany generate 10% of GDP and, at the turn of 2010/2011, employed 4.5 million people providing knowledge-based services in regulated and non-regulated liberal professions. Ensuring the quality of education

standards, observing codes of conduct, either through legislation or on a voluntary basis, creating trust and confidence in dealings with clients or patients are all very important concerns for these professions. These are all values that play a major and central role in European civil society. They are values and features that constitute important assets for European civil society. Another central concern for the liberal professions is protecting citizens and their human rights. Doctors, lawyers and engineers are concerned about the environment in which their fellow citizens live and work. That is why all members of the liberal professions also act as representatives of popular interests in debates involving decisions that impact on society.

Maritime pilots, pension advisers, company auditors, architects and engineers, doctors and dentists overcome many problems in their day-to-day work and come up with many interesting solutions. That is why I feel at home and at ease in Group III, with its many diverse facets.

The liberal professions form the nucleus of civil society in Germany and act as the interface between the state and the people. For this reason, they strongly believe that there must be a middle ground between the employers and employees and their particular places in society for all other groups, interests and areas with individual characteristics.

That is what Group III is for.

Best wishes, Arno Metzler.