



European Economic and Social Committee



Europe III

The voice of Group III
Various Interests
January 2016



Should we Believe in the Delphic Oracle?

ED
Editorial



Luca JAHIER (IT)
President of the Various
Interests' Group

For over 1,000 years the Delphic Oracle made mystic predictions, advising citizens on minor and major decisions. "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess" are only two of some 500 pieces of advice by the Oracle which have survived through the ages. So what would Pythia have said about 2016? Will the next twelve months augur well or ill?

Certainly 2016 began with both a whimper and a bang. A whimper as New Year celebrations here in Brussels were cancelled amid threats of a terrorist attack. A bang, as from 1 January international events have moved at a very rapid pace. In just the first few days we have been faced with the prospect of North Korea testing a Hydrogen bomb, escalating disputes between Saudi Arabia and Iran which will undoubtedly have serious regional repercussions, sexist attacks in Cologne and the German re-publication of Hitler's 'Mein Kampf', seventy years after it was banned. The death of a great Artist, David Bowie, took all of us by surprise. But of course, 2016 has also brought depressing continuation. For let us not forget the endless stream

of miserable refugees risking their lives crossing the Mediterranean. The death of innocent children in Europe's Sea is the one continuum that is heart-wrenching for all of us.

If we are to speak of curious developments over the first few days of 2016, personally I would rank very highly the fascinating proposal by international scientists to define a new geological epoch, the 'Anthropological Epoch'. The argument put forward is that since the 1950s our species has profoundly changed our 4.6 billion year-old planet. Humanity's impact has apparently been sufficiently pervasive to justify a separate classification. The final decision will of course be made by the International Commission on Stratigraphy, but the proposal does beg the question of how our species, which has only existed for a very short time, has managed to have such an impact (positive or negative).

This brings me back to the title of this Editorial, 'Should we Believe in the Delphic Oracle?'. I would argue yes. For although we cannot predict whether Vladimir Putin,

in his 16th year of political leadership, will maintain the same levels of support among Russians as he currently enjoys, we can at least agree that it all depends on his own good health.

We cannot predict whether the referendum on the future of the UK within the EU will favour the 'Nays' or the 'Yeas'. However, it is certain that the negotiations will lead to the promise of substantial reforms which will be welcomed by several other EU Member States. It is also certain that the referendum itself will take place in 2016, prior to the French and German national elections in 2017.

Finally, we cannot say for sure that the 2016 elections in the US and UN will lead to the appointment of women in charge of positions of global leadership. Nonetheless, we could agree that it is time to give women the opportunity to shape global affairs at the highest levels. If anything, we should be inspired by the female heroine of the new Star Wars film...

On a more serious note, we can believe in the Delphic Oracle because its advice was made in riddles, leaving the receiver to interpret the message as his or she saw fit. This is precisely how it should be: a human prediction for human problems. Our world in 2016 will no doubt continue to be a place of drama, turmoil, vulnerability and extremism. It is our world and we have created it. It is our choice. But my optimistic prediction for 2016 is that just as in 2015 we worked together, globally, to fight Ebola and we succeeded, albeit it late. Just as in the final days of 2015, 195 countries signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, an impressive example of international solidarity. So in 2016, we will again join forces to at least make progress in combatting the challenges facing all of us: those of security, climate change, wars, etc. Even Pythia would have to agree with that prediction...

Luca JAHIER,
President of the Various Interests'
Group of the EESC

SPECIAL FEATURE: Result COP21 Conference in Paris



Lutz RIBBE (DE)
Member of the Various Interests' Group
Vice-President of the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO)



Last year the EESC was represented at the Climate Change Conference of the United Nations (COP21) in Paris by a small delegation, with Lutz Ribbe attending for Group III.

The result of the COP21 negotiations was celebrated almost euphorically in the press. And not without reason, as one of the main objectives was reached, namely the real commitment of all

states to take action against climate change. This is indeed a historic result. However, in terms of the promised reduction that would keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, the goal is not yet achieved. That is a bitter disappointment, and more effort is needed.

Most importantly from our civil society point of view, however, is that Paris has demonstrated again that there is another "world" apart from that of the negotiators, one where other key players operate. Companies realise that the future means renewable energy, and not fossil fuels. Many

investment funds have announced that they will no longer support projects where climate-damaging energy sources are used; thus there is an enormous amount of money available for innovative investments.

Signs of optimism can be seen around the world, and this is very gratifying. However, the small EESC delegation – including all three Groups – agreed that although Europe is still doing pretty well in the global context, it must be careful not to fall behind the rapid ongoing developments in this sphere. Most investment in "green technologies"

is no longer made in the EU, but in China, the United States, Canada and other parts of the world. We have lost our technological lead in solar cell and storage technologies, and electric cars do not carry the label "Made in the EU". European car manufacturers seem to be more interested in removing the driver than in removing emissions.

Europe wants to be number one in renewable energies worldwide. That is the emissions objective of the Juncker Commission. To achieve this, however, a lot needs to be done, much more than has been set in motion so far.

News from Group III



Belval

In the context of the Extraordinary Group III meeting on 2nd of December in Luxembourg, the Group conducted a field visit to Belval to understand its incredible reconversion project. Once the site of Luxemburg's biggest ironworks, Belval is now one of the most ambitious urban development projects in Europe, with one very special feature: parts of the former industrial site were retained and uniquely integrated in the new concept. The two remaining blast furnaces not only bear witness to a long-gone era, but are also landmarks of New Belval (see picture).

Belval is now also the home of the new University of Luxembourg, a school complex, a college and countless research institutes and start-up companies.

Group III missions on "Managing the refugee and migration crisis"

The EESC is organising a series of 12 missions to come to grips with the work carried out by civil society organisations dealing with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the framework of its going local programme. The visits aim to identify problems, needs, as well as successes and best practices of the various organisations active in the current refugee crisis.

According to a recent EESC opinion on the European agenda on migration, where Group III member Cristian PIRVULESCU, Honorary President of the Pro-Democracy Association (APD) was rapporteur: "The current refugee crisis, occurred because of the absence of a common asylum policy, the delay of which was due to the absence of concerted European political action. The EESC urges the EU to create a genuine asylum policy".

The missions' end goal will be to provide a well-founded and documented input to EU policy making, as a follow-up to its opinion "A European Agenda on Migration: Second implementation package".

Group III members going on mission:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Akos Topolanszky: Hungary | Primož Sporar: Slovenia |
| Karolina Dreszer-Smalec: Poland | Ulrika Westerlund and Oskar Wallner: Sweden |
| Christian Moos: Malta | Antonio Longo: Italy |
| Cristian Pirvulescu: Greece | Marina Škrabalo: Croatia |
| Arno Metzler: Germany | Dilyana Slavova: Bulgaria |
| Alfred Gajdosik: Austria | Yves Somville: Turkey |



Gonçalo LOBO XAVIER presents communication priorities to Group III for mandate 2015-2017

At the Extraordinary Group III meeting on Monday 16 November 2015, EESC Vice President for Communication M. LOBO XAVIER presented the work of the communication department to the members of Group III. Mr. LOBO thanked former Vice President Jane Morrice for her work and guidance, and outlined the work of the communication department, including success stories and future challenges. Mr. LOBO particularly emphasized the importance of Going Local and collaboration with other institutions. His message to the members: *Get involved! Help us to communicate (y)our work.*



New team member

We are happy to welcome a new member of the secretariat staff. Sander Kashiva, half Dutch and half Indian, previously worked at several European Commission DGs, both as an assistant and a training coordinator. He holds a degree in Translation Studies from the Haute Ecole Francisco Ferrer, Brussels, and a Postgraduate Degree in Conference Interpreting from the HUB – KU Leuven. Sander joins us from DG TAXUD (European Commission), where he worked in the unit dealing with excise duties on tobacco and alcohol. Sander speaks and writes Dutch, French, English and German fluently and has a sound knowledge of Italian. He will be the personal assistant to Luca Jahier, President of Group III. *Welkom Sander!*



The Dutch presidency

The Netherlands will hold the presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2016. The presidency has a big say in setting priorities and implementing items on the European agenda. The Netherlands has always taken the presidency seriously and is therefore keen for there to be an ambitious agenda. The Dutch government has discussed the presidency agenda with the parliament and consulted the relevant civil society stakeholders. The Netherlands' main priorities are as follows:

- To closely involve civil society in the drafting of plans;
- To prepare and develop a strategic agenda for the EU in times of change;
- To create jobs, not least through innovative growth.

It goes without saying that the first priority is of considerable interest for the important civil society stakeholders of the European Economic and Social Committee.

The Dutch government has announced the goals of the presidency in all policy areas.

Among other things, the Netherlands wishes to set in motion a process to make it easier for European consumers to choose healthy and safe food. A conference will be organised on the subject. In addition, an informal meeting of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council will be held to discuss an enhanced joint approach to improving the quality and safety of food products at EU level.

The Netherlands shall steer agricultural policy towards meeting the global challenge of feeding the expected global population of least 9 billion people in 2050. To this end, the Netherlands will focus on "climate-smart" agriculture and the task of addressing

food waste in all parts of the food chain. The Dutch presidency will organise a number of events including an exchange of views with stakeholders on their experience of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy, with an eye to the future of this policy after 2020.

It goes without saying that putting into practice and implementing the outcomes of the Paris summit (COP21) is high on the agenda. In this connection, the Netherlands has announced the climate, environment and sustainability-related matters it wishes to deal with in a comprehensive manner. One such example is the circular economy, where a number of initiatives will be taken. The Netherlands intends to organise an official high-level meeting to discuss how countries can work together effectively to create a circular economy.

There are of course many topics in this area which could (and should) be discussed from the viewpoint of the EESC in general and Group III in particular. However, in the light of the contribution of our food system to the decline of biodiversity and climate change and the impact of climate change on agricultural production, the Dutch members of Group III have chosen "food" as the theme to be discussed at a Group III meeting to be held in The Hague on 21 and 22 April. The meeting will take place on the premises of the Dutch Economic and Social Council.

Dick Westendorp, Klaas-Johan Osinga, Jan Dirx



Dick WESTENDORP (NL)



Klaas-Johan OSINGA (NL)



Jan DIRX (NL)

Members of the Various Interests' Group

Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role



Ariane RODERT (SE)
Vice-President of GR III

LUXEMBOURG EU PRESIDENCY'S PRIORITY FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY RESULTS IN HISTORICAL COUNCIL CONCLUSION.

Luxembourg prioritised the social economy early on in its EU Presidency. Since then, the EESC has worked closely with the EU Presidency and has, inter alia, drafted an opinion on the financial ecosystem for social economy enterprises (INT/770). The strong commitment to the European social economy agenda was clearly demonstrated during the specifically dedicated conference hosted by the Luxembourg Presidency on the theme of "Boosting Social Enterprises in Europe". This event was held in Luxembourg on 3-4 December and revolved around issues of how to support the social economy, social innovation and, in particular, the financial ecosystem required. The EESC was well represented, with its president, Mr Dassis giving the opening speech. A large EESC delegation was also present.

The exploratory opinion requested by the Luxembourg Presidency was specifically featured and presented by the Rapporteur, Ariane Rodert. It was also highlighted in a publication on financing which was launched during the Presidency Conference. <http://www.uless.lu/en/news/financing-social-economy-enterprises>

The Luxembourg Minister, Mr Schmit, has actively promoted the need for the social economy sector for jobs, growth and inclusion. During his concluding remarks at the conference on 4 December 2015, six EU Member States – France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Spain – adopted the Luxembourg Declaration calling for more support for social economy enterprises within the EU.

But even further historical steps were taken with the Council adopting conclusions on the promotion of the social economy as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe. In its conclusions, the Council calls on Member States and the Commission to develop European, national, regional and/or local strategies and programmes for enhancing the social economy, social entrepreneurship and social innovation.

Finally, the Ministers encourage social economy enterprises and social entrepreneurs to become actively involved in the development of European policies and strategies promoting their sectors of activity and will continue their promotion in an informal ministerial working group for a common agenda. The conference concluded with the Slovak EU Presidency announcing that a similar event on the social economy will be hosted during its Presidency in the autumn of 2016. The newly-created Permanent Study Group for Social Economy Enterprises and the Social Economy Category Group will continue to take forward the agenda for the social economy.



Nicolas Schmit at the press conference following the EPSCO Council in Brussels on 7 December 2015 (c) The European Union



IOANNIS VARDAKASTANIS (EL)
Vice-President of GR III

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

3 December is European and International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This year, it coincided with the launch of the European Commission's proposal for a long-awaited European Accessibility Act. The disability movement has been campaigning for years for this important piece of legislation, which will have a significant influence on the accessibility of goods and services for 80 million Europeans with disabilities.

As is the case every year, the European Disability Forum (EDF) joined forces with the European Commission to organise a 2-day conference in Brussels. The conference, held on 7 and 8 December 2015, brought together more than 200 people from all over Europe, including young people with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, representative organisations, government representatives and academics. This year's theme was children and young people with disabilities and access to education as a key factor in enabling them to participate in labour market and in society.

Mr Ioannis Vardakastanis, Vice President of Group III at the EESC, spoke at the opening ceremony in his capacity as President of the EDF. Mrs Gunta Anca, a member of Group III and of the EESC Bureau, spoke at the closing ceremony in her capacity as Vice President of the EDF. They both highlighted that in

Europe, an estimated 1 million children are living in institutions. They are separated from their families and face daily abuse and violence. Children from ethnic minorities and children with disabilities are disproportionately represented in institutions. The EU is obliged to support deinstitutionalisation in Member States, and suspend, withdraw and recover funds if the obligation to respect fundamental rights is breached.

It is very important that the EU adopts the long awaited equal treatment legislation that will protect persons with disabilities, including children, against discrimination. It should also ratify the Istanbul Convention to ensure that women and girls, including those with disabilities, are no longer victims of gender-based violence.

The winner of the 2016 European Access City Award was announced at the conference. Commissioner Thyssen and Ioannis Vardakastanis presented the awards. The city of Milan, Italy, won first prize. Each year, this innovative competition awards cities that proactively support and improve accessibility for citizens with disabilities.

The EU set a very good example by ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and last year its work was reviewed by the UN CRPD Committee. The EU institutions should work together with organisations which represent persons with disabilities to achieve a better Europe – a Europe without barriers and without discrimination. The EESC is close to the people and it brings together perspectives from civil society, employers and social partners in EU policy making. With its newly established permanent study group on disability, the EESC can play an important role in influencing future EU disability policy, including the European Accessibility Act. Let's continue working together towards this goal. It's ambitious but not impossible



Cillian LOHAN (IE)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

RETAILER'S ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PROGRAMME

The Committee hosted the first meeting of the new Retailer's Environmental Action Programme (REAP) on Thursday 3 December 2015. REAP is a voluntary initiative by retailers, in collaboration with the European Commission, aimed at reducing the environmental footprint of the retail sector. This new three year mandate will involve retailers committing to initiatives focused on the Circular Economy.

The session started with a presentation of the December published Circular Economy Package by Mr. Daniel Calleja Crespo, Director of DG Environment. Further details on the package and answers to specific questions were given by Mr. Kestutis Sadauskas who is the Director of Green Economy for the Commission.

The Commission was very focused on the opportunities available to business and citizens as a result of implementation of this package. There is a recognised need to use our resources in a smarter more sustainable way. The linear model of take-make-use-dispose is no longer suitable for the needs of today's modern societies.

In the afternoon there was a working session on the environmental impact of retail on a circular Economy context. A keynote address was given by Mr. Jocelyn Bleriot of the MacArthur Foundation. There followed a panel discussion on Retail and Circular Economy with a round of question and answers. The audience was engaged and interested in the need to adapt their businesses to this changing landscape, where new concepts such as the prioritisation of services use over goods use and ownership present new challenges to existing business models.

The Committee has already established its study group on this package and the rapporteur for the Circular Economy Opinion NAT/676 is Irish member Mr. Cillian Lohan of the Green Economy Foundation. Mr. Lohan spoke as a member of the panel and set out the history of the involvement of EESC in this area. A withdrawn previous package on the Circular Economy has established some agreed positions of the Committee and some of what was called for in that opinion has been delivered in this new communication. In other areas it has been weakened, with some targets lowered and other removed entirely. The Commission feels that the new targets are more achievable and take in to account the challenges of specific member states.

Mr. Lohan spoke about the need to provide consumers with convenient options that will allow them to make choices that support a circular economic model.



Dilyana SLAVOVA
Member of the Various Interests' Group
President of REX section

THE EUROMED SUMMIT

The EESC organized and hosted the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions on 30 November – 1 December 2015, to which Dilyana SLAVOVA, Member of Group III and President of the REX section, participated. This meeting marked the 20th anniversary of the Euromed Summits, which were launched on the basis of the mandate conferred by the Barcelona Declaration in 1995. It brought together some 120 participants from a range of economic and social councils, or similar institutions, representatives of employers, trade unions, other economic and social interests groups and NGOs from countries which are members of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The forum aims at promoting greater understanding of the main issues affecting organised civil society in the Euromed region and at discussing the common challenges they face. This year the exchange focused on the following topics: The situation in the region twenty year after the Barcelona Process, the new European Neighbourhood Policy, the role of the social partners in the consolidation of political democracy, migration.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of a final declaration that was sent to the political authorities involved in the Euromed Ministerial Summits as civil society's contribution to the summits, and disseminated widely amongst civil society organisations in the region.

Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 9-10 December 2015 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.



Reine-Claude MADER (FR) – INT/771 "Report on Competition Policy 2014" (EESC opinion 247/2015)

The EESC supports the steps taken by the Commission to ensure compliance with competition rules, including measures to tackle anti-competitive practices such as abuse of dominant position. These practices hinder the economic development of the EU.

The EESC does regret, however, that the Commission has failed to adopt a genuine legal mechanism for collective actions that would provide effective enforcement of the right to damages for those affected by anti-competitive practices.

The EESC welcomes the impetus given by the Commission to cooperation with national competition authorities, which have a key role to play and should have the necessary means to carry out this work. Given the globalisation of trade, the abovementioned cooperation should be extended to the international level so that Europe is not undermined by unfair competition.

The EESC supports the changes to State aid rules which have been aligned so as to support innovative enterprises, particularly in the digital domain.

While conscious of the limits of the Commission's action on tax planning, the EESC would like the Commission to continue to take steps to rectify fiscal and social distortions, while ensuring that this does not lead to a race to the bottom.

The EESC is in favour of creating a European Energy Union to ensure security of supply and affordable energy prices across the EU. It believes that the measures to open up the energy market should benefit consumers, who lack genuine scope for negotiation.

The EESC calls for every effort to be made to provide free access to digital infrastructure so as to enable rural areas to develop.

In the EESC's view, it is essential to follow up and assess any policy measures taken.



Seamus BOLAND (IE) – NAT/672 "CAP simplification" (exploratory opinion)

The EESC recognises the fact that the European Commission has made it a priority to thoroughly simplify common agricultural policy (CAP) implementation and that it has already proposed, and will continue to propose, the simplification of certain Commission acts, making EU legislation easier to understand and to implement on the ground.

The EESC believes that increased transparency and legal certainty, and the reduction of unnecessary administration and associated costs for farmers, other beneficiaries, producer organisations and

national administrations, is a necessary part of the simplification process.

Inspections and possible fines must be proportionate to the amount of money received by the beneficiary, the reasons for the non-compliance and the willingness to take corrective actions. Clear instances of deliberate fraud must be dealt with via normal procedures.

Application of greening measures must take into account unexpected factors such as weather conditions, drought or other such events that make the measures impossible to implement.

Where matters such as permanent grassland have been the subject of decisions in the European Court of Justice, it is important that rules established to respect the judgement are designed in a manner that minimises regulations rather than increases them.

Temporary grassland should retain the status of arable land, regardless of how long it is used as grassland.

The current definition of an "active farmer" must not disadvantage farmers and should be based on the fact that land eligible for aid is being used by the farmer for agricultural purposes.

The EESC recommends that a rule on limiting increased bureaucracy be established, for example, the adoption of a rule to allow for the elimination of an existing regulation when a new one is proposed.



Cristian PIRVULESCU (RO) – SOC / 525 "European Agenda on Migration" (EESC opinion 4319/2015)

The EESC welcomes the Commission's "European Agenda on Migration", which symbolises a new-found understanding of the need to address migration at a European level, and encourages the Member States to collectively support the implementation of this Agenda.

The immediate challenge for the EU is to ensure that people seeking international protection are treated properly. The EESC supports the immediate setting up of 'hotspots' to support countries faced with a large influx of migrants and insists they are given the necessary resources and support.

The EESC believes the EU has to establish a truly common European asylum system based on harmonised procedures. This includes uniform asylum status and mutual recognition of asylum decisions, a revised Dublin Regulation, shared responsibility and burden-sharing.

The EU must have a more effective immigration policy in place to address challenges posed by its ageing population and a growing skills shortage. Such comprehensive legal migration policy aimed at welcoming newcomers that is transparent, predictable and just.

The EESC considers that the cost of non-integration greatly exceeds the cost of integration and that the EU and its Member States need to build robust integration systems. Social partners, local authorities and civil society must play an essential role, while paying particular attention to women.

The EU must secure its external borders. A European rather than a national effort is required, which may entail sharing some national competences in this area.

All EU external policies must be streamlined and focus on helping the countries of origin to reach a reasonable level of human security, stability and prosperity. The EESC is well aware that this is a long-term goal fraught with enormous difficulties.

It is necessary to enforce cooperation in the field of readmission to ensure an effective and timely implementation of the Return Directive.

The EESC therefore calls on the EU and its Member States to increase funding and material support for civil society organisations.

Cristian PIRVULESCU (RO) – SOC / 526 "European Agenda on Migration: Second implementation package - A permanent crisis relocation mechanism under the Dublin system" (EESC opinion 5408/2015)

The refugee crisis in the EU has reached the point at which the founding principles of human rights protection and democracy are being called into question. The EESC strongly believes that these principles must be upheld and properly implemented and, in these exceptional circumstances, we need more Europe, more democracy and more solidarity.

The current refugee crisis, although foreseeable, occurred because of the absence of a common asylum policy. In this context, the EESC urges the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament to implement Articles 67(2) and 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which lay down the conditions for the EU to create a genuine asylum policy.

The EESC welcomes the efforts made by the European Commission to coordinate a common response to the refugee crisis.

The crisis relocation mechanism is a concrete example of cooperation based on solidarity and responsibility. The EESC wishes to have this relocation mechanism included in a general strategy in order to ensure coherence and efficiency. There is a need for robust, solidarity-based systems of burden-sharing, especially a permanent, fair and binding system for allocating those seeking protection between all EU countries.

The European Commission and the other EU institutions must actively support the Member States to provide proper conditions and prospects for integrating the relocated asylum applicants.

*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>*

Highlights of the December 2015 EESC Plenary Session

Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Christian MOOS (DE) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "Control of the acquisition and possession of weapons" – INT/777

Michael SMYTH (UK) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "Steps towards Completing European Monetary Union" – ECO/394

Carlos TRIAS PINTO (ES) President of the study group for the opinion on: "Establishment of National Competitiveness Boards within the Euro Area" – ECO/395

Etele BARATH (HU) President of the study group for the opinion on: "Investing in Growth and Jobs – maximizing the contribution of European Structural and Investment Funds" – ECO/396

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL) is Rapporteur Working Alone of the study group for the opinion on: "Structural Reform Support Programme for the period 2017 to 2020 and amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 1305/2013" – ECO/398

Carlos RIAS PINTO (ES) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "Economic policy of the euro area" – ECO/397

Kinga JOÓ (HU) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "The challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers" – SOC/529

Ask Løvbjerg ABILDGAARD (DK) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: "European Accessibility Act" – SOC/527



Cristian PIRVULESCU (RO) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: "European agenda on security" – SOC/528

Lutz RIBBE (DE) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "State of the Energy Union 2015" – TEN/580

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>

OUR GROUP'S STRENGTH

The Consumers and Environment Category will meet for first time on 03/02/2016 under the chairmanship of Bernardo HERNANDEZ BATALLER (ES) and Michel DUBROMEL (FR). The agenda of the meeting will be available in due course.

The SMEs, Professions & Crafts Category will meet for the first time on 03/02/2016 under the chairmanship of re-elected

spokesperson Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL). The agenda of the meeting will be available in due course.

The Farmers Category will meet for first time on 03/03/2016 under the chairmanship of John BRYAN (IE). The agenda of the meeting will be available in due course.



Quote of the month...



"Be always at War with your vices, at peace with your neighbours, and let each New Year find you, a better person."

Benjamin Franklin
1705 - 1790

Founding father of United States