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The **EESC** priorities during the **Estonian Presidency**

July – December 2017



European Economic and Social Committee

A word from the President

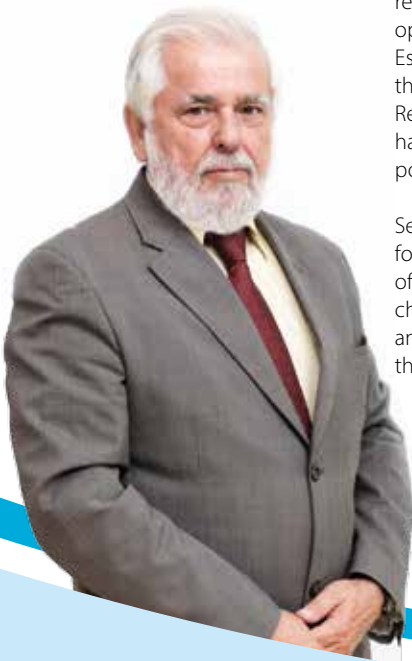
In the second half of 2017, Estonia will take on the presidency of the EU Council for the first time. Unarguably, Europe is currently facing complex internal and external challenges, including the start of the negotiations regarding the UK's exit from the EU. Among other things, slow growth and persistently high unemployment in many Member States, the ongoing migrant and refugee flows and heightened terrorism threats are spreading uncertainty, making people susceptible to populist movements.

No country has a magic wand to resolve such economic and political pressures during its six-month Presidency. However, I am convinced that Estonia is well placed to move things forward in a positive direction that benefits both the Member States and the Union.

My conviction stems from the following factors:

First, the history of Estonia, which this year is celebrating the 99th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, provides a remarkable lesson in courage, determination, diligence and optimism. Throughout centuries of rule by foreign powers, Estonians held on to the ideal of independence, preserving their national identity and dignity against totalitarian rule. Reasserting its sovereignty and independence in 1991, Estonia has achieved remarkable progress over the past 25 years on the political and economic front within the European family.

Second, I am pleased to note Estonia's meticulous and focused Presidency preparations which have yielded a set of well-calibrated priorities that take into account current challenges. The four Presidency priorities link economic, social and political concerns with sustainability and security. Under the overarching guiding aim of ensuring that the EU remains





united and decisive, the objectives of an open and innovative economy, a safe and secure Europe, a digital Europe with free flow of data and an inclusive and sustainable Europe can make a significant contribution to resolving the challenges at hand and developing appropriate policy tools. I am also pleased to see that all four priorities address issues that have been at the forefront of our work at the EESC, reflecting the views of relevant interest groups in specific recommendations.

Third, we are encouraged by the outstanding prominence attributed to civil society and civic initiative in Estonia, which provides a solid guarantee for a successful Presidency. I feel compelled to emphasise the “Estonian Civil Society Development Concept” (EKAK) approved by the Estonian Parliament on 12 December 2002, which recognises the development of civil society as a matter of significant national importance. Estonia has developed a noteworthy structure of support for non-governmental organisations by using revenue from gambling to develop civil society organisations and establishing the National Foundation of Civil Society (NFCS) which enables civil society organisations to pursue their objectives efficiently and conscientiously. Furthermore, the government has adopted a civil society development plan, which aims to promote civil society in 2015–2020.

We hope to see Estonia’s encouraging commitment to civil society reflected in the activities and final document of the Presidency.

Representatives of Estonian civil society and authorities have participated actively in EESC initiatives, such as the recent debates organised with civil society in the Member States on the European Pillar of Social Rights and the migration crisis. Following the same model of consultation, at the request of the Commission the EESC has undertaken to table proposals on the future of Europe.

We therefore look forward to the opportunity to work closely with Estonian civil society and the competent authorities to initiate broader discussions around the priority issues with a view to improving the lives of European citizens in a prosperous, secure, inclusive, sustainable and open society well equipped to embrace its digital future.

Georges DASSIS
President of the EESC

The priorities of European civil society during the Estonian Presidency



The Estonian Presidency comes at a crucial time for Europe, when all decision-makers and stakeholders are being called upon to take part in the reflection process on the future of our Union. Against the background of the Brexit negotiations, as well as the multiple geo-political, security, economic and social challenges that the EU needs to immediately address, the overarching objective of the Estonian Presidency will be to ensure that the EU remains united and decisive. Taking these developments into account, the EESC will continue its priority work on the **White Paper on the Future of Europe** and the series of **reflection papers** in the different domains of EU policy-making announced by the European Commission.



Building an open and innovative European economy has been announced as the first priority of the Estonian Presidency. In this respect, the EESC will devote particular attention to the issues of deepening the **Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)** and the **future of the EU's finances**. In its recent opinions, the Committee has already made a number of proposals on the short-, medium- and long-term development of the EMU, as well as on a more future-oriented EU budget. It will now follow up on these, notably in light of the options and scenarios for development presented in the respective Commission reflection papers.

In addition, based on this year's European Semester of economic policy coordination and in anticipation of the next one, the EESC will make a number of recommendations on the policies which the euro area Member States need to pursue in the year to come. In a separate opinion, the Committee also intends to address the problem of wealth inequality in Europe and to start a broad public discussion on this issue that might feed into future policy proposals by the European Commission in this field.

The economic and financial crisis has hit the euro area hard, has left long-lasting traces on economic performance and has entailed social hardship of many kinds, especially in countries that were particularly severely affected, such as Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Spain and Italy. To consolidate the lessons learned from the experience of austerity measures during the crisis management period in these countries, and with the aim of identifying possible preventive and alternative public policies, the EESC is working on an own-initiative opinion on "Lessons learned for avoiding the severity of austerity policies in the EU".

The Committee will contribute its position on the proposal for the next **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**, which will cover the period starting from 2021. The EESC will thereby build on the policy recommendations it put forward in the opinion on the mid-term review of the MFF 2014-2020 and in an own-initiative opinion on "A performance-based EU budget and its focus on real results".

Regarding taxation, the EESC is drawing up, at the request of the Estonian Presidency, an exploratory opinion on the topic of "Taxation of the sharing economy". This opinion explores how the new models of business, work, and consumption in the sharing economy can be taxed appropriately and fairly. As regards indirect taxation, the EESC will feed into the policy debate on legislative proposals that result from the "Action Plan on VAT", on which the EESC has presented its findings and recommendations. In particular, the EESC will contribute to shaping a definitive VAT system for business-to-business (B2B) intra-EU transactions on goods. Furthermore, the EESC will provide input into the forthcoming corporate taxation package, which will include the long-standing issue of a **common consolidated corporate tax base (CCCTB)**. With a view to enhancing tax transparency, the EESC will also work on the initiative to introduce effective disincentives for advisors, promoters and enablers of aggressive tax planning schemes resulting in tax avoidance or evasion. In addition, the EESC is working on an own-initiative opinion on "A favourable tax system for fair competition and growth" with the aim of formulating solutions that can help to mitigate the negative effects of tax competition and contributing to building a fairer and more transparent European fiscal system.

As regards financial markets and the financing of the economy, the upcoming period will be marked by work on the **mid-term review of the Capital Markets Union action plan** that will seek to strengthen the current policy framework by taking stock of the progress on the implementation of the action plan, updating the proposed actions in light of evolving market circumstances, and outlining complementary measures in response to key challenges. As part of this work the EESC will examine a proposed regulation for a framework for an EU personal pension product. The EESC will continue its work on the two legislative proposals that amend the European Market Infrastructure Regulation (EMIR). Subject to the presentation of these initiatives by the Commission before the end of 2017, as is planned, the Committee will also examine a REFIT evaluation of the Financial Conglomerate Directive (FICOD), a comprehensive revision of the EU macro-prudential policy framework, a revision of the financing model for the European Supervisory Authorities, a review of the appropriate prudential treatment for investment firms, and a legislative initiative on an integrated covered bond framework.

During the Estonian Presidency, the EESC intends to dedicate special attention to the debate on the territorial dimension of **post-2020 Cohesion Policy**. The Committee will also continue its work on the **development of urban areas**, supporting the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda and focusing on refining this European project. Finally, the EESC will continue to actively participate in implementing macro-regional strategies as well as other European programmes.

With inequality, poverty and social exclusion still on the rise, the EESC intends to continue to focus on the preservation of the **European social model**, placing special emphasis on the Commission's latest social package and its proposal to establish a European Pillar of Social Rights. The labour market transition will be a priority for the EESC, and at the request of the Estonian Presidency, the EESC will examine the impact of new forms of work on the role of social partners and other civil society organisations and examine new policies and changing roles and responsibilities in the provision and development of skills, including digital skills, in new forms of work. Special attention will be paid to measures that increase the quality of employment and remove barriers to integration into the labour market for young people and women, and especially for the long-term unemployed and people living in poverty. This is also reflected in the choice of topic for the **EESC Civil Society Prize**, to be awarded at the end of the six-month period: "Innovative projects to promote quality employment and entrepreneurship for the future of work". As regards improving access to the labour market combined with greater gender equality, the EESC will comment on the long-awaited Commission **proposal on work-life balance**.

The Committee will continue to look at the impact of the digital transition and the transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient and green economy on employment, skills, social security and labour law. In a separate opinion, the Committee will also address the **adequacy and sustainability of social security and social protection systems in the digital age**.



The EESC will maintain its efforts to strengthen the rule of law and fundamental rights, fight discrimination and exclusion, and give visibility to civil society organisations working in these fields. In its opinions, it will look at the role of civil society in preventing the radicalisation of young people, and at civil society's role in different areas of societal life, mainly through the lens of financing of civil society organisations.

The Committee will continue to support a **more open migration and truly common asylum policy** based on greater solidarity and shared responsibility in the European Union. It will work

to ensure better recognition of the contribution that migrants make to Europe's economy and society, promote their **integration into the labour market and society at large**, advocate for the improvement of their education and training, and continue to call for their fundamental rights to be fully respected. The EESC will also contribute to the evaluation of existing legislation on legal migration.

At the request of the Estonian Presidency, the EESC will prepare an exploratory opinion on **Land use for sustainable food production and ecosystem services**. The opinion will be



presented at the high-level conference on soil issues that the Estonian Presidency will hold on 4-6 October 2017. The EESC will contribute, by means of opinions and other activities, to the re-evaluation process in relation to a greener and leaner **post-2020 CAP**, notably by means of an opinion on the communication on the future CAP, expected to be adopted by the Commission by the end of 2017. The Committee will continue pushing for practical implementation of the territorial impact assessment of all EU policies, dubbed “rural proofing” in the Cork 2.0 Declaration “**A Better Life in Rural Areas**”. Thanks to its Permanent Study Group on **Sustainable Food Systems**, the EESC will continue to high-

light the need to tackle the multiple economic, environmental and social consequences of food production and consumption via a holistic and integrated approach. It will prepare an opinion providing civil society’s contribution to the development of a comprehensive food policy in the EU, promoting more sustainable agricultural production, a fairer distribution of the added value in the food supply chain, environmental protection, better education and training on food sustainability, and more efficient prevention and reduction of food waste.

The EESC will contribute to COP23 in Bonn by promoting specific recommendations on how civil society’s role in **climate action** can be enhanced and by disseminating its opinion on climate justice. The EESC is part of an International



Climate Coalition on Multi-stakeholder and Multi-level Governance which aims to develop a toolbox of policy instruments to stimulate bottom-up engagement of various actors in a range of climate action projects. The results of the coalition's work will be set out in an exploratory opinion requested by the Commission's DG CLIMA.

Contributing to the practical implementation of the global **Sustainable Development Goals** will also rank high on the EESC's agenda. The European Multi-stakeholder Platform for Sustainable Development that the European Commission will soon create should provide an opportunity for the EESC to foster dialogue between European institutions and various civil society representatives. In the field of the **circular economy**, the organisation of a platform together with the European Commission involving non-governmental stakeholders and experts will contribute to the implementation of the EC Action Plan for the Circular Economy. The EESC will work on new key initiatives relating to a legislative proposal on water reuse, a Plastics Strategy and a communication on the interface between chemicals, waste and product legislation. In a new prospective opinion, the EESC will adopt recommendations on how various **emerging economic trends** and developments, such as the low-carbon circular economy, the collaborative and functional economy and the digital revolution, should be better promoted to deliver on the SDGs. The EU 2020 Steering Committee will also organise a conference on **A New Paradigm for the Post-2020 Strategy for Europe** on 23 and 24 November in Budapest. The purpose is to take stock of the progress of the 2020 Strategy and to orient it towards 2030 and beyond, taking account of the ongoing societal challenges facing Europe, both internally and externally.

It will be structured around the themes of inclusive, sustainable and smart growth, which continue to be relevant, and will focus on the role of organised civil society in the necessary governance and transformation processes.

Furthermore, the EESC is taking the initiative to contribute to the debate about an overarching EU strategy for the post-2020 period with an opinion that will put forward **elements for an EU long-term strategy** which is people-centred, brings the economic, social and environmental dimension of development into a sustainable balance, and addresses long-term global trends and challenges, such as the digitalisation of the economy, the shift to a low-carbon economy, the transformation of labour markets and rising inequalities.

The EESC will adopt an opinion on the EC Communication on **"An Action Plan for nature, people and the economy"** that will provide a comprehensive response to the findings of a recent fitness check of the Birds and Habitats Directives. This new opinion will complement a 2016 own-initiative opinion on EU biodiversity policy, and an opinion on the mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme.

Pursuing its aim to monitor trends and present proposals on the relevant issues that affect consumers, the Committee will follow up the main conclusions of its 19th annual **European Consumer Day**. The EESC will move forward with its work in the area of **social enterprise and the social economy**. In addition to monitoring and evaluating political developments at EU and Member State level, it will identify specific measures to improve the general environment

of social economy enterprises, disseminate best practices in the Member States, and raise the sector's profile. In this context, the EESC will organise the second European Day of Social Economy Enterprises on 28 June 2017. **New economic models**, notably the collaborative economy and the functional economy, will remain on the EESC's agenda. The Committee has been at the forefront of dealing with these trends and will continue to monitor developments, but will take a more coordinated approach, clearly linking the role that these new trends play in facing Europe's sustainability challenges. For some years now, new practices have been being brought in to our societies (digitalisation, the circular economy, the collaborative economy, "uberisation", etc.) that are profoundly disrupting business, professional, political and civic practices. This major upheaval primarily affects younger generation and should – now more than ever – be the focus of our concerns. The Committee therefore wishes to open a cross-cutting and comprehensive discussion on this issue in order to shape an approach which will take us up to 2050. It expects the Estonian Presidency to contribute to an innovative discussion at European level, since national solutions will not be sufficient.

The EESC is also very active in the field of **research and innovation** and will comment on the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020, which will be published in the autumn of 2017.

The Committee will closely examine the counterfeit and pirated products industry and come up with recommendations for measures to combat counterfeiting. It will also look into the specificities

of the European sugar beet industry. A prospective wrap-up conference "From industrial change to Society 4.0", is planned for the end of the year to explore new cross-cutting avenues of industrial, economic and social transition.

The Committee will actively contribute to the main EU external policy areas, such as **trade, enlargement, neighbourhood, and development**.

The promotion of legal migration and youth employment in **Africa**, and the improvement of economic, social and cultural rights in the **Euromed** region, will also be a key topic for the EESC under the Estonian Presidency. Regarding the **Eastern Neighbours**, active involvement of the Civil Society Platforms with **Georgia, Moldova** and **Ukraine** will be the main priority. The Committee will invite the Estonian Presidency to participate in the various civil society bodies that input into our relations with those countries.

The Committee will follow up on **EU trade negotiations** and civil society monitoring of EU agreements. Special attention will be paid to the agreements with **Canada**, the **USA**, **Japan** and **Mercosur**. The Presidency will be invited to follow up the EESC's work on those agreements and, more generally, its work on **trade and sustainable development**.

The Estonian Presidency will be involved in the EESC's work on the EU's enlargement policy and will be invited to the EU-**Western Balkans** Civil Society Forum. The EESC will also closely follow EU-**Turkey** relations, at a time when civil society dialogue is more necessary than ever. Regarding **Latin America**, the Presidency will be invited to attend the EESC's biennial meeting of EU and



CELAC civil society organisations. The EESC will focus its work on certain horizontal issues such as the EU strategy on **international cultural relations and the external dimension of the social economy**.

In terms of the digital agenda, implementing the **Digital Single Market** (DSM) strategy will remain at the core of the Committee's work. The Committee will continue to support the European Commission in its efforts to boost Europe's productivity, innovation and employment by reinforcing the data economy as an essential resource for economic growth, and addressing legal uncertainties created by new data technologies. The EESC agrees with the Commission's objective of ensuring the free flow of data across

the EU and will devote special efforts to the upcoming legislative proposals on accessibility and reuse of public and publicly-funded data, and cross-border e-commerce, while also insisting that high standards for privacy and data protection be maintained. Finally, given the importance of cyber resilience for all areas of civil society, the Committee will hold a public hearing in autumn 2017 addressing cybersecurity challenges which will aim to contribute to the Commission's review of the EU Cybersecurity Strategy and of the mandate of the EU Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA).

The EESC will build on its previous opinions on the **European Energy Union** and continue to engage with more specific legislative proposals. In particular, the Committee will aim to lend **strong support to the Energy Poverty Observatory** to be set up by the European Commission this year, following EESC recommendations from 2013. Responding to energy poverty by means of a shared European understanding of the challenge is key to increasing public acceptance of the energy transition and boosting support for the European Union. Another aspect of ensuring that citizens do not feel left behind is to ensure that civil society can participate and contribute politically and economically to the energy transition. The EESC has – for almost a decade – sought to raise awareness among policy-makers, citizens and civil society organisations of the importance of a transparent and participatory Energy Union governance process. In order to demonstrate the added value of public participation, the Committee will hold a high-profile conference on the **European Energy Dialogue** in September 2017 in which citizens and civil society will be given the opportunity to alert decision-makers and experts to their concerns and questions in relation to the energy transition and the Energy Union process. Beyond the conference, the EESC will continue to make civil society's voice heard in relation to EU energy policy, for instance through its **annual opinion on the State of the Energy Union report** in autumn 2017. In addition, the Committee will endeavour to promote the idea of public participation and an energy dialogue in the Member States in the context of developing and monitoring the National Energy and Climate Plans via its members' networks in national civil societies across the EU Member States.

The Committee will continue to focus its work on maintaining and enhancing the competitiveness of the **European transport sector**. As a keen supporter of a genuine single market for **maritime transport**, the Committee welcomes the designation of 2017 as European Maritime Year and will follow up on the Commission's work in this field.

Moreover, the EESC will closely follow the Commission's ongoing mobility package initiatives focusing on four overarching themes, namely a well-functioning internal market (including market access), decarbonisation, digitalisation, and the social dimension of the transport sector.

Building on its recent activities, the EESC will also promote the implementation of the **Connecting Europe Facility and the TEN-T policy**. In this context, the Committee will further expand the participatory dialogue between public authorities and civil society, in particular on selected core corridors of the TEN-T network, in order to improve understanding and acceptance of transport policy measures and the quality and efficiency of the decisions to be taken. A follow-up conference is envisaged as a way to put this idea into practice. By the end of 2017, the EESC will also launch the "Platform for Change", an initiative which was highly appreciated by the Commissioner in charge of transport, aiming to increase women's employability and thus reach gender equality in the transport sector.

The Estonian members of the EESC



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A word from the Estonian Presidency



Matti Maasikas

Deputy Minister for EU Affairs of Estonia

For the first time in its history, Estonia will be at the very heart of European decision-making when it takes up the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 July 2017. The Estonian Presidency is devoted to carrying on effective dialogue with the social partners and civil society in order to put our overarching vision of **unity through balance** into effect.

It is our belief that to create new opportunities and achieve the best possible outcome for European citizens, we must strike a balance between different traditions, interests and opinions in Europe today. In recognition of the important role that the European Economic and Social Committee plays in connecting Europe to its citizens, we will seek to work closely with the EESC to ensure that a wide range of views and opinions from across the EU is reflected in the policy process.

During Estonia's six months at the helm, we will prioritise the policies that are of critical importance to the future of the European Union and its citizens. This is why **an open and innovative European economy** that supports economic growth and employment is at the centre of our presidency programme. With this aim, the Estonian Presidency will focus on developing a clear and transparent business environment that encourages both knowledge-based growth and competitiveness. We will seek to make rules smart and simple, while also pursuing new funding opportunities for companies and a stable banking sector.

As Estonia is known for its digital forwardness, it will come as no surprise that **the digital agenda and the free movement of data** is a key priority for our presidency. In fact, digital affairs and e-solutions feature prominently throughout our



presidency programme. This is because we see embracing technological change to be critical for economic growth and for facilitating the lives and needs of our citizens and businesses, especially in their relationship with the government. During its six months, the Estonian Presidency will focus on developing cross-border e-commerce and e-services, managing new forms of work stemming from digitalisation, and advancing cross-border and digital public services, while working to ensure that modern and secure electronic communications are available throughout Europe.

As the migration crisis, international terrorism and organised crime continue to be sources of risk and instability for the EU, **a safe and secure Europe** is high on the agenda of the Estonian Presidency. During the Presidency, Estonia is committed to strengthening the EU's internal security by facilitating cooperation between police and security forces in different countries and making the financing of terrorism more difficult, while also implementing modern IT solutions and introducing databases to support the functioning of the Schengen Area. We will seek unity in the EU's external relations and increased cooperation with the EU's allies in both foreign and defence policy. In particular, the Estonian Presidency is committed to maintaining strong EU-NATO relations, and supporting and developing a strong neighbourhood policy, including close relationships with Eastern Partnership countries.

To make sure that all European citizens, including future generations, benefit from a strong European economy, we must strike a balance between our economic goals and our social and environmental goals. Hence, an **inclusive and sustainable Europe** is an integral priority

of the Estonian Presidency. Estonia is committed to the Paris Agreement and pushing ahead with the main strands of the EU's climate and energy policy. An inclusive and sustainable Europe supports equal opportunities for high quality education, employment, access to services and development of skills. The Estonian Presidency will focus on labour mobility and free movement of persons and stand for equal opportunities in the labour market and in society.

Matti Maasikas

Deputy Minister for EU Affairs of Estonia



General information on Estonia

Official name	Republic of Estonia
Capital	Tallinn
Area	45 230 km ²
Other main towns (in terms of population)	Tartu, Narva, Pärnu, Kohtla-Järve
National language	Estonian
Currency	Euro
Population (01/01/2017)¹	1 304 031
Foreign born population	14.7 %
Urbanisation	68 %
GDP in current prices (in millions of euro, 2016)²	20 916.4
GDP per capita (in Purchasing Power Standards [PPS], EU-28 = 100, 2015)²	75
Employment rate (persons aged 20-64 years, 2017)	70.2 %
Unemployment rate (2016)	5.6 %
Life expectancy at birth (2017)¹	Women: 81 years / Men: 73 years
Main exports (% of total exports, 2016)³	Electrical equipment, Wood and articles of wood, Furniture, Mechanical appliances, Mineral products and Transport equipment
Main imports (% of total exports, 2016)³	Electrical equipment, Mechanical appliances, Transport equipment, Mineral products, Plastics and articles thereof and Wood and articles of wood

¹ <http://countrymeters.info/en/estonia>

² Eurostat

³ Trademap



For your diary

5 July 2017	Opening of the photo exhibition “Estonian Colours” by Aivar Pihelgas (Brussels)
6 July 2017	Presentation of the priorities of the Estonian Presidency of the EU by Matti Maasikas, Deputy Minister for EU Affairs of Estonia, EESC plenary (Brussels)
12 September 2017	Extraordinary meeting of the EESC Various Interests’ Group (Tallinn)
13–14 September 2017	High-level conference “Future of Work: Making it e-Easy” (Tallinn)
6 October 2017	Extraordinary meeting of the EESC Workers’ Group (Tallinn)
24–25 October 2017	Manufuture conference and EESC Employers Group’s seminar on “Advantages of Digital Society” (Tallinn)
7 November 2017	Opening of the photo exhibition on Estonian nature by Remo Savisaar (Brussels)
9–10 November 2017	Digital transport conference (Tallinn)
6 December 2017	Estonian cultural evening (Brussels)



European Economic and Social Committee

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