



EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee
A bridge between Europe and organised civil society
July 2017 | EN



EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

Keep believing

As the President of the Commission was promised, the Committee has started its work on the future of Europe. To this end, it has invested. A number of us took on the task of consulting civil society locally, in our own countries – not just because it is worth providing the Committee with the best possible information about everyone's expectations, but also because the Committee has resolved to put the Commission's wishes into practice: that citizens should take ownership of the debate. Indeed, this is the very essence of the mission conferred on the Committee by the treaties.

We have modest means. For cost reasons, we are unable to organise "decentralised" debates on all the issues that are referred to us – even with the help of economic and social councils and other national institutions, local representations of European institutions, or the large organisations that our members represent directly. But we have to be courageous, take action and invest at the right time and where there are good grounds for doing so.

Moreover, the Committee has often called on the decision-making EU institutions to do likewise: to dare to invest funds and resources for our citizens and for our economy. This is not only morally justified; it is also economically beneficial.

Investment is also politically beneficial. I believe that we have gone a very long way down the road of dismantling solidarity and the European project, and I very much hope that an increasing number of our countries' current or future leaders will finally grasp that the strategy of blaming the EU for everything is not beneficial – not even for them personally. It is in their interest (including at the ballot box) to do the opposite: to be able to point to EU successes that they have played a significant role in achieving. In reality, a substantial majority of citizens do not want to embark on some kind of reckless endeavour; there are probably even decent numbers of people who have been won over by populism who could be convinced to support the European project if it was explained to them correctly, it worked properly and they did not feel marginalised.

Initially, the Committee will aim to send the Commission a key message on the views of organised civil society, so that the Commission can make use of it immediately after the summer break. Of course, the process does not end there. I cannot predict the content of this message, but I do hope that, one way or another, it will show a willingness to roll back the extremist and populist surge by once again spurring on the development of the EU, with a new attitude and restoring its original aim: peace, our values, and our citizens' well-being.

Georges Dassis
EESC President

Artificial Intelligence: Europe needs to take a human-in-command approach

The EU must adopt policies to develop and deploy AI in Europe in such a way that it works for, rather than against, society and social well-being, the EESC has said in an own-initiative opinion on the societal impact of AI.

"We need a human-in-command approach to AI, where machines remain machines and people retain control over those machines at all times," said rapporteur **Cateljine Muller** (NL – Workers' Group).

The AI market amounts to approximately USD 664 million and is expected to grow to USD 38.8 billion by 2025. It is largely undisputed that AI can have significant benefits for society: it can be used to make farming more sustainable and production processes more environmentally friendly, improve the safety of transport, work and the financial system, provide better medical treatment, etc.

But the benefits can only be achieved if the challenges surrounding AI are also addressed. The EESC has identified 11 areas where AI raises societal concerns, ranging from ethics, safety,



transparency, privacy and standards to labour, education, access, rules and regulations, governance, democracy, warfare and superintelligence.

These challenges cannot be left to businesses alone: governments, the social partners and scientists should also be involved. The EESC believes it is time for the EU to take pole position globally in this area by defining **European norms and standards, a European ethical code** and

labour strategies to retain or create jobs.

The opinion also calls for a **European AI infrastructure** with open-source learning environments that respect privacy, real-life test environments and high-quality data sets for developing and training AI systems. Coupled with a **European AI certification or label**, this could have the additional benefit of giving the EU a competitive advantage (dm).

EESC urges Commissioner Navracsics to adopt Action Plan on cultural diplomacy



Plenary debate with Commissioner Navracsics (centre) and rapporteur Luca Jahier (first from right)

The EU needs a concrete plan to champion culture as a vital element in open, tolerant societies. The EESC held a debate with Commissioner Navracsics and voted through its opinion on the EU's

strategy for international cultural relations.

"At a time when extremism is increasing, when our citizens are questioning their common identity more than ever - now

is the moment to firmly place culture and cultural policies at the heart of the European political agenda" said rapporteur **Luca Jahier**, President of the EESC's Various Interest Group. "The EU should grasp the momentum and create a concrete strategy and action plan for international cultural relations", taking advantage of the impetus created by the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage.

While welcoming the recent Joint Communication, the EESC also urged the Commission and EESC to recognise culture as a pillar of sustainable development, make use of culture in peace building and conflict resolution strategies and include interreligious dialogue.

Commissioner Navracsics praised the EESC's opinion and agreed on the importance of all stakeholders, especially civil society, in the implementation strategy. (mm/mq)

DIARY DATES

7 September, Brussels
European Energy Dialogue: Progress, Governance, and Civil Society Participation

12-13 September, Tallinn (Estonia)
Smart solutions for a sustainable and inclusive society

20-21 September, Brussels
EESC's plenary session

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Do not forget that the Energy Union was meant to benefit citizens and businesses



Rapporteurs Alfred Gajdosik and Tellervo Kylä-Harukka-Ruonala

Assessing the **2nd annual report on progress towards the Energy Union**, the EESC urged the European Commission to “go back to basics”: “We must remember why we are doing all this. We are doing it for citizens, for businesses and for the benefit of the whole of society,” said rapporteur **Tellervo Kylä-Harukka-Ruonala** (FI – Employers’ Group). Progress monitoring should focus on practical indicators – energy prices, industrial production figures, jobs created, emission cuts, said the EESC.

The EESC also encouraged the EC to take measures to strengthen the EU’s carbon handprint – an indicator that refers to all the total positive impacts of one’s action on the environment. EU emissions are expected to shrink to about 5% of global emissions in the coming decade. “So we are still left with

the remaining 95%,” said the rapporteur. “Europe should strive to export its low-carbon systems and products to the rest of the world. This will allow us to fight climate change not just in Europe, but across the globe.”

The EC’s new rules to make the **electricity market in the EU** compatible with renewable energy were the focus of another opinion adopted at the EESC’s May plenary. While

welcoming the package, the EESC stressed that more needed to be done: “The EESC supports the right of all consumers – industry, business and private households – to generate, store and trade energy themselves. Local communities should also be given the right to set up, develop or rent local networks. But more specific rules are needed to make it possible to assert these rights,” said rapporteur **Alfred Gajdosik** (AT – Various Interests Group).

Decarbonisation was also a concern, with the need to factor the external costs of conventional energy, such as climate change and damage to health, into prices. Failure to “internalise” these costs puts renewable energy at a competitive disadvantage. A tax regime would help steer investments towards green electricity, said the rapporteur. (dm)

EESC asks Commission to consider broadening Carcinogens Directive

Introduction of new exposure limits to prevent work-related cancer is welcome, but could be extended to reprotoxic substances and formaldehyde



The European Commission should consider broadening the scope of its Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive (CMD) to substances which are toxic for reproduction, after carrying out an impact assessment for this purpose, the EESC

argued in its opinion **Protection of workers from carcinogens or mutagens at work**.

The opinion looked at the Commission’s second proposal for a CMD revision, which introduced new binding occupational exposure limit values (BOELs) for five substances considered to be carcinogenic. The first proposal for 13 new BOELs was made in May 2016 and another update is due in 2018.

The EESC called upon the Commission to pay more attention to carcinogenic exposures primarily affecting women employed as, for example, hairdressers, cleaners or health workers. It also recommended that a BOEL be adopted for formaldehyde.

The EESC asked for improvement of the common methodology used to determine the BOELs, due to differing standards between the Member States. Some countries have defined BOELs for more than a hundred different substances and others for fewer than ten.

Work-related cancer kills more than 100,000 people in the EU every year. (ll)

A stronger, reshaped CAP to better serve farmers and the environment

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is an essential EU policy and any changes to it must provide strong support for the European model of agriculture and family farming. The EESC has made specific proposals in its opinion on **A possible reshaping of the CAP**.

The EESC is very much in favour of maintaining the CAP’s two-pillar model. In the words of rapporteur **John Bryan** (IE – Various Interests Group): “Direct

payments are an essential support to farm incomes, play a key role in the financing of market management measures and the delivery of public goods... Rural development payments are critically important and should focus on economic, environmental and social programmes based on the objectives of the Cork 2.0 declaration to support vulnerable regions and sectors”. The future CAP must also deliver on Europe’s international commitments with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals and COP 21.

EP President Tajani and EESC president Dassis commit to improving cooperation, helping people regain trust in Europe



EP President Antonio Tajani with EESC President Georges Dassis

EP President **Antonio Tajani** joined the EESC plenary session, on Thursday 1 June, to discuss the EP’s priorities and the strengthening of cooperation between the two institutions.

“The three main challenges we need to work on together are unemployment (especially youth

unemployment), migration and terrorism,” said Mr Tajani.

EESC President **Georges Dassis** said that every single action and effort of the Committee made it clear that the EESC stood for European democracy and was “truly engaged in making the slogan – for a united, democratic, solidarity-based, peaceful and prosperous Europe, close to its people – a reality”.

Mr Tajani and Georges Dassis pledged to improve dialogue between the EP and the EESC both formally and informally and to hold regular exchanges, discuss ideas, engage, and deepen cooperation so as to ensure a robust response to what is happening on the ground. This should, in turn, improve the effectiveness of EU policies, with a clear impact on the lives of ordinary citizens. (mr)

“We need a quantum leap in European Defence Cooperation”

It is essential for the EU to continue pursuing preventive and multilateral diplomacy, but at the same time Europe needs to strengthen its military defence capabilities to guarantee freedom and peace, says the EESC.

In its opinion on a **European Defence Action Plan** adopted in May, the EESC supports the European Defence Union (EDU) and calls for close European defence cooperation.

“NATO remains the foundation of European collective defence. But the EU must also take on more responsibility for the security of the Union and its citizens. We need closer cooperation between Member States, which can best be achieved within a European Defence Union,” said rapporteur **Christian Moos** (DE – Various Interests

Group). As a first step, the EESC calls for common strategic objectives to be set and welcomes the planned coordination committee.

“This fragmented defence market is in contradiction with the strengthening of EU security”, said co-rapporteur **Jan Pie** (CCMI delegate – SE). Fragmentation causes the inefficient allocation of resources, overlapping remits, lack of interoperability and technological gaps.

The EESC, however, advises against using current investment funds to finance the defence industry and backs the EC’s proposal of creating a European Defence Fund restricted to defence research and the development and acquisition of military capabilities. (sma)



EESC launches its 2017 Civil Society Prize

It will reward “Innovative projects to promote quality employment and entrepreneurship for the future of work”

The EESC has launched its 2017 Civil Society Prize, worth EUR 50 000. This year, awards will go to innovative projects that aim to help newcomers, and other people who require specific support, to enter the labour market.

Applications must be submitted by 8 September 2017. Winners will receive their award on 7 December 2017.

The EESC Civil Society Prize, now in its ninth year, rewards initiatives by civil society organisations and/or individuals that have made a significant contribution to promoting European identity and integration.

Job creation, employment and the quality of work for all social groups have been a constant focus of EESC activities (see e.g. <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.social-affairs>).

Further details about the Civil Society Prize and the application form are available online at <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.civilsocietyprize>. (ac)

Other key points of the opinion include:

- addressing the critical challenges of climate change mitigation, environmental and biodiversity protection;
- ensuring that the post-2020 budget addresses the financial needs resulting from Brexit, farm income pressure and the increase in demand for public goods;
- creating strong targeted programmes to encourage employment of young farmers and women;
- simplification through greater use of technology and moving away from the audit/inspection approach, an extension of the yellow card system, etc.
- maintenance and protection of EU standards on traceability, food safety, and animal and plant health controls. (sma)

President Trump's decision means we need more civil society involvement in the climate transition

Statement by EESC President Georges Dassis

The decision of US president Donald Trump to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement is a disastrous one and sends the wrong signal to the whole world. This decision is on the wrong side of history, and it is the United States and its citizens that will suffer most. The transition to a low-carbon world is taking place everywhere: in cities and the

countryside, in industry, and within public and private organisations. It is a groundswell, and the decision of the United States will not stand in its way.

The EESC has for many years been encouraging civil society initiatives involving grassroots groups of individuals, SMEs, workers and various associations. These often voluntary initiatives must be supported if they are to make a more substantial and extensive contribution to efforts under the Paris

Agreement. The EESC is determined to work with these initiatives started at local and regional level so as to better understand what is needed to put sustainable and effective measures into practice. The Committee has joined forces with a number of like-minded stakeholders, such as the European Committee of the Regions, the OECD and Comité 21 (a French network of sustainable development stakeholders). At the next Conference of the Parties (COP 23), which will take place in November

in Bonn, these stakeholders plan to articulate specific proposals to strengthen the role of civil society and local authorities under the Paris Agreement. Mr Trump's withdrawal from the agreement has made it even more important for civil society to play a strong role. The world's citizens need to take their fate into their own hands and endeavour through their everyday activities to work towards a sustainable future.

In this new context, European climate leadership is even more essential than before and will have to be further stepped up in multilateral climate talks, including the crucial COP 23 meeting.

Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union: united and decisive Europe

In the second half of 2017, Estonia will take up the presidency of the EU Council for the first time. While Europe is facing complex internal and external challenges, including the start of the negotiations regarding the UK's exit from the EU, migration and stagnant economic growth, the overarching aim of the Estonian Presidency is to ensure that the EU remains united and decisive.

The four priorities of the Estonian Presidency are:

- an open and innovative European economy,
- a safe and secure Europe,
- a digital Europe and the free flow of data,
- an inclusive and sustainable Europe.

As the holder of the presidency, Estonia also believes that it is important to listen to the views of relevant interest groups as part of the European Union's work, and to strike a balance between the different opinions, traditions, and interests within Europe. Every initiative should be designed to facilitate the lives of businesses and citizens, and to reduce bureaucracy, using as many e-solutions as possible.

Reflecting the importance of these priorities, the Estonian Presidency has asked the EESC to issue exploratory opinions on the following subjects:

- Provision and development of skills, including digital skills, in the context of new forms of work: new policies and changing roles and responsibilities.
- The role and opportunities of social partners and other civil society organisations in the context of new forms of work
- Land use for sustainable food production and ecosystem services
- Taxation of the sharing economy (mra)



In conjunction with the Estonian Presidency, the EESC is hosting an exhibition of work by photographers Aivar Pihelgas, Jaanus Ree, Ilmārs Znotiņš, Jelena Rudi, Sven Začek and Rene Mitt featuring scenes from one of the largest amateur choral events in the world, involving thousands of singers and dancers dressed in colourful national costume.

The exhibition will open during the July plenary session (5 July 2017) and can be visited until 31 July in Foyer 6 of the JDE building. (jp)

Key EESC events in connection with the Estonian presidency

- **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 Maasilta, Deputy Minister for EU Affairs, EESC plenary (Brussels)
- **12 September 2017:** Extraordinary meeting of the EESC's 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:** Manufature conference and EESC Employers' Group 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) (mra)

ACP-EU: 28th meeting of Economic and Social Interest Groups

Delegates discussed lessons learned from EPAs and called for greater involvement of economic and social actors in post-Cotonou development policies

The EESC held the 28th triennial meeting of Economic and Social Interest Groups from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states and EU countries in Brussels in May. Five main themes

were outlined in a jointly accepted declaration: trade relations, the new European consensus on development, the prevention and reduction of food loss and waste, industrialisation as a development driver, and the future of EU relations with the ACP countries.

Opening the debate, **Yves Somville** (BE – Various Interests Group), President of the EESC's

ACP-EU follow-up committee, explained that the meeting was to focus on: "striving to achieve a modern, equitable and genuine future partnership with ACP countries". **EESC President Georges Dassis** added: "We need to build a strong relationship between the EU and the ACP countries in which everyone wins. We will fight for a framework that ensures the participation of non-state actors and civil society organizations". (mm)

How the EESC helped change the face of EC stakeholder consultations

Bernd Dittmann (DE – Employers' Group), rapporteur on Better Regulation, talks to EESC Info about his experience as EESC representative in the European Commission's Refit Platform

EESC Info: Mr Dittmann, what purpose does the REFIT Platform serve?

Bernd Dittmann: The Platform was announced in the Commission's 2015 Better Regulation Agenda and started its work in January 2016. It brings together representatives from Member States and stakeholders who evaluate proposals for regulatory simplification made via "Lighten the Load". I share the mandate with **Denis Meynert** (FR - Workers' Group) and **Ronny Lannoo** (BE - Various Interests Group), all jointly representing the interests of the EESC. The Platform's opinions are presented directly to First Vice-President Frans Timmermans and feed into the Commission's annual work programme (CWP).

What priorities did you focus on during your term?

The priorities were set based on the input of the sections and focused on a number of simplification



EESC member Bernd Dittmann

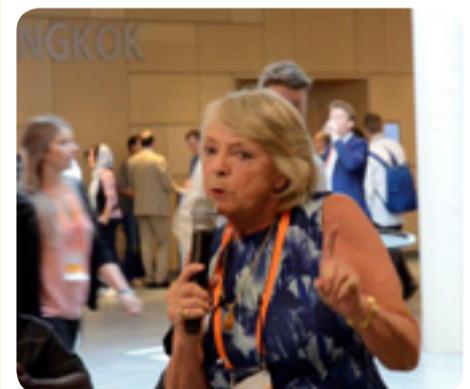
proposals concerning (among others) the Construction Products Regulation, the Late Payment Directive, and stakeholder consultation mechanisms. This last example is particularly noteworthy: drawing on the 2015 EESC opinion on Commission stakeholder consultations by Ronny Lannoo, representatives of the unions, consumers and industry jointly drafted recommendations which were adopted unanimously by all stakeholders and received the full support of

Vice-President Timmermans. This opinion will compel the Commission to review the way it conducts public consultations – an issue that has been subject to public debate for a long time.

After completing your term, what are your conclusions on the Platform?

I think that our participation in the Platform is an example of a best practice in terms of successful collaboration between the three Groups in the Committee. Additionally, it increases our standing vis-à-vis Member States and offers a real opportunity to contribute to more efficient legislation. Last but not least, it gives us the opportunity to help shape EU policy agendas by feeding into the CWP. This means that the Platform has quite substantial added value for the EESC – and vice versa.

Jane Morrice suggests EU honorary citizenship for Northern Ireland



EESC member **Jane Morrice** has suggested that Northern Ireland should be made an honorary EU member while remaining part of the UK. The proposal came in response to the Heads of EU States and Governments' call for "flexible and imaginative solutions" to Ireland's unique circumstances in the forthcoming Brexit negotiations.

Honorary EU membership would protect the peace process in Northern Ireland and prevent a hard border with the Republic of Ireland, in keeping with the Good Friday agreement, wrote Jane Morrice in an article recently published by Euronews. It could also "promote peace worldwide by making Northern Ireland the launchpad of a new EU-led, global peace-building initiative", according to Ms Morrice, who in 2008 was rapporteur for an EESC opinion on **The role of the EU in the Northern Ireland peace process**. For more information on Jane Morrice's proposal see: <http://bit.ly/2rdm1vN> (dm)

Time is running out for Europe

by the EESC's Workers' Group

The opinion that the EESC is preparing as a reaction to the Commission's White Paper on the future of Europe is of particular significance to the Workers' Group. The members of this group wish to send a clear message that Europe must change, that it cannot tolerate inequality any more.

To do this, Europe needs to recover that common sense of purpose that guided its founding fathers, if its achievements and values are to be preserved and if it is to have a future.

This is why the EESC is calling for deeper and more cohesive integration in many fields, ranging from energy and climate policy, the Digital Single Market and EMU governance to a common industrial policy. However, what workers need is an immediate promotion of upward social convergence, in terms of employment and social outcomes, more and better quality jobs and fair wages.

With this in mind, the Workers' Group stresses the importance of social and economic cohesion, an area where the creation of the Single Market and the common currency set expectations



which have not yet materialized. For this reason, it strongly supports the introduction of a **Social Pillar**, to add a strong social dimension to the Single Market and make sure that the benefits of the ongoing economic recovery serve the whole of society, including the most vulnerable populations. (mg)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a new frontier of rights and progress for the EU

Conclusions of the Conference organised by the Various Interests Group in Brussels, 22-23 May 2017

by the EESC's Various Interests Group

Thirty years after the definition of the concept of sustainable development, our common future is very much under threat. At a time when others are turning their backs on their commitments, it is imperative that the **EU maintain the momentum**, accelerating, investing in and **embracing change**. Now is the time for long-time engagement, to make the transition to an inclusive, equitable, resilient, low-carbon, circular and collaborative economy. Now is the time for **political leadership**, to rethink our growth models and improve well-being. To balance economic prosperity with innovation, social inclusion, **democratic participation** and environmental sustainability, all within



Luca Jahier, President of the Various Interests Group

our global borders. We must have the conviction and boldness to defend the universal, indivisible and mutually reinforcing dimensions of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

It is therefore crucial that we **build on our European values** and safeguard the exercise of human, economic, social and cultural rights. However, we can only design and **deliver this new world** by working transparently and in

partnership with the greatest possible number of social and economic actors from a wide spectrum of civil society organisations. It is **civil society** that will **drive change**, with **bottom-up initiatives** that respect the opinions and rights of local people. Moreover, we can only embark on this new world by making sustainable development financially accessible to all citizens, by transforming perceptions, attitudes, developing an attractive new narrative and, ultimately, by creating a culture of sustainability among Europeans. This will be the basis for **inspiring new hope** and **trust** in our democratic systems. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will become our **European Social Contract of the 21st Century**.

Read the final recommendations here. (cl)

Employers call for specific measures to facilitate private investment

by the EESC's Employers' Group

Removing obstacles to investment and improving promotion of private investment are the measures that employers think are crucial so as to encourage private sector investment in Europe. In a joint declaration, all major Maltese employers' organisations, together with the government of Malta and the Employers' Group of the EESC, set out the most urgent issues for policy-makers in terms of making investment easier.

EU and national policies must provide stability and make it easier to do business. The single market is an important asset for attracting investment,

but greater flexibility and pragmatism is required. More private and public investment is needed in areas such as technology and innovation, according to the declaration.

"Businesses need freedom to operate, and we call for legal, regulatory and political stability to attract long-term investment," said **Jacek P. Krawczyk**, President of the EESC Employers' Group. "Our economies are crying out for breathing space. We need to responsibly liberate and liberalise our investment strategies," added **Joseph Muscat**, the Prime Minister of Malta.

The declaration was signed during the conference entitled **Does the EU**



Maltese Prime Minister, Joseph Muscat, and Mr Krawczyk, Employers' Group President, right after the signing ceremony

encourage private investment?, which took place on 11 May 2017 during the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The conference was jointly organised by the Employers' Group and all Maltese employers' organisations. (lj)

IN SHORT

EESC celebrates 30 years of Erasmus - A milestone for European identity

Since 1987, the Erasmus exchange programme has had a major impact on the lives of more than 9 million Europeans. Last month, the EESC and the Université Libre de Bruxelles held an event to celebrate the programme's 30th anniversary and adopted an opinion on the Erasmus+ mid-term evaluation.

While Erasmus was recognised as a milestone in the creation of a European identity, both civil society and students called for more funding and opportunities for the disadvantaged and pointed out the need to improve civil society's participation in governance of the programme as well as cross-sectoral cooperation.

"Erasmus is a fantastic European achievement benefiting young people. It must be extended to secondary school students and to workers, especially young apprentices", stated EESC President, **Georges Dassis**. (mq)

EESC Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier @ the Eurovision for Startups

On 7 June, EESC Vice-President **Gonçalo Lobo Xavier** participated in the **StartUp Europe Awards** ceremony at the European Parliament, where he delivered two of the 10 prizes on offer. The initiative, which has been dubbed as a "Eurovision for startups", recognised the 10 most outstanding startups across Europe in 2016, in the categories: Creative, Energy, Fintech, Green, Health, ICTs, Smart Cities, Social, Tourism and Water. EP President Antonio Tajani, who strongly championed this initiative, played host to the ceremony while R&I Commissioner Carlos Moedas addressed the winners and handed out prizes. Awards were presented to Robocamp (PL), Tespack

(FI), INZMO (ET), Windcity (IT), NeuronGuard (IT), VyzVoice (LU), CityCrop (EL), TempBuddy (IE), Waynabox (ES) and APSU (ES).

The award, now in its first year, is promoted by the European Commission and implemented by Finnova Foundation in cooperation with Startup Europe. It aims to identify inspirational examples which can help develop entrepreneurship in Europe. Like much of the EESC's work, it focuses on identifying sustainable growth models and investment strategies to create jobs as well as means to turn the EU into a resource-efficient and competitive economy. (mre)

EESC Vice-President Lobo Xavier and Commissioner Malmström wish the EU Green Bikers' 5th tour a safe journey



Commissioner Malmström and EESC Vice-President Lobo Xavier with the EU Green Bikers outside the Berlaymont building

On 31 May, EESC Vice President **Gonçalo Lobo Xavier** and European Commissioner for Trade **Cecilia Malmström** accompanied the EU Green Bikers by cycling with them for the first kilometre of their annual cycle ride, which this year takes them to Essen, Germany.

such as green infrastructure, showing that this is one of the EU's main priorities. They promote each capital's efforts by reaching it via the most sustainable and environmentally friendly means of transport – the bicycle.

Departing from the Berlaymont building, they escorted the 8 cyclists to the Cinquantenaire Arch and wished them success on their fifth annual bike tour to an EU green capital. The group visits EU capitals that carry out special initiatives to address environmental challenges

This EU Green Bikers ride aim to reach Essen by 2 June and return to Brussels on 4 June – an almost 600-km journey in total. This year, the EU Green Bikers come from 7 nationalities and include 5 men and 3 women. Their previous tours have taken them to Nantes (2013), Copenhagen (2014), Bristol (2015) and Ljubljana (2016). (mm)

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