



European Economic
and Social Committee

March issue



Civil Society Week

Civil Society Organisations'
Bulletin



ΟΜ'ΑΔΑ ΤΩΝ ΟΡΓΑΝ'ΩΣΕΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΚΟΙΝΩΝ'ΙΑΣ ΤΩΝ ΠΟΛΙΤ'ΩΝ

BULLETIN MARCH 2026

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EDITORIAL: Towards more resilient communities and sustainable development goals beyond 2030

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Cillian Lohan ©EU/EESC

By Cillian LOHAN, President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

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It has been an incredibly busy week for us in the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group ([CSO Group](#)), and for the EESC in general, with the culmination of [Civil Society Week 2026](#) today. This week is always a chance for us to throw open the doors of our premises in Brussels and welcome a wide range of civil society actors from all over Europe and neighbouring countries – and the response this year was impressive.

Our CSO Group aims to amplify the voices of all civil society organisations, which we do by continually empowering our members to be active and engaged in the EESC's work. But we also achieve this by building our alliances and connections with those civil society organisations that are not directly represented at the EESC. This week has been a great opportunity to make that a reality. You will see in this month's edition of our bulletin that much work was done and many areas of follow-up work identified.

The theme of Civil Society Week 2026 was 'People, Democracy and Resilience – Our Future!'. This aligns very well with our CSO Group work programme. Working to make our communities more resilient in terms of different sectors is a critical goal for us. Whether in agriculture and fisheries or consumers and the environment, we have a broad range of topics and interest groups represented in the Group, which all combine to give us a true picture of what is needed to make our communities resilient.

These priorities are laid down in more detail in this month's bulletin. We want you to discover them and to join us on our journey to make an impact, to create the type of future that we all want to see.

We have a particular focus on sustainability as a concept, working on what will happen after 2030 – a year that will mark the end of the United Nations [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the current Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)). It will take strong engagement from civil society to ensure that the ambitions set out in these goals do not disappear from the highest political agendas post-2030.

Earlier this month, one of the key players in negotiating the SDGs in 2015 joined us to explain the process of getting 193 countries to agree a text and an ambition with practical targets. Ambassador David Donoghue, who was Ireland's Permanent Representative to the United Nations until August 2017, shared with us his hope that we will succeed in ensuring that the SDG ambitions live on beyond 2030 by designing a new framework or prolonging the current one.

We are most effective when we communicate with each other, clarify our messages, and work collaboratively to drive change for a brighter future and a vibrant European Union.

[Cillian LOHAN](#)

President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group



CURRENT AFFAIRS: Civil society at the heart of Europe - Reflections from Civil Society Week 2026

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EESC President Boland engaging with the participants of Civil Society Week 2026 © EU/EESC

By Séamus BOLAND, EESC President and member of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing Irish Rural Link

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The third edition of the [Civil Society Week](#) has just drawn to a close, and what an extraordinary four days it has been. The EESC welcomed participants from across Europe and beyond, bringing together grassroots activists, social partners, volunteers, and institutional leaders under one shared ambition: shaping a future rooted in people, democracy, and resilience.

This year's edition explored an impressive breadth of themes. From tackling poverty and social exclusion to confronting the affordable housing crisis and safeguarding civic space, all themes that have an impact on everyday life. We examined how Europe can truly become a Union of opportunities, security, and resilience for everybody.

The diversity and calibre of speakers reflected the importance of this moment. European Commissioners, European Parliament Vice-Presidents and high-level representatives from EU institutions listened and took note of what civil society leaders and young people have to say.

A recurring message throughout the week was clear: organised civil society is not peripheral to democracy—it is part of its core infrastructure. At a time when more than [one in five people in the EU remain at risk of poverty or social exclusion](#), and [young Europeans face housing insecurity](#), [climate anxiety](#) and economic uncertainty while the shadow of war covers Europe's border, civil society organisations and social partners are often the first to respond and the last to give up. Encouragingly, young people continue to express confidence in Europe's future. That optimism is both inspiring and demanding, as it calls for tangible results.

We also confronted uncomfortable truths about [shrinking civic space](#) and mounting pressures on organisations defending fundamental rights. Protecting them means protecting our values and our democracy, which allow our economy to thrive and our social model to be sustainable.

Heartfelt thanks to the [EESC Liaison Group](#) with European networks, [ECI stakeholders](#) and [national Economic and Social Councils](#), who skilfully co-organised the sessions, as well as to EESC members, participants, speakers, and especially to the dedicated EESC staff whose tireless work made this week possible and successful.



[Séamus BOLAND](#) (Ireland)

President, European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#))

Member, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Chief Executive Officer, [Irish Rural Link](#)

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CURRENT AFFAIRS: Bridging the democratic gap for Europe's youth

5 March 2026

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Youth Council of Latvia

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For a democracy to thrive, it requires more than just institutional structures – it requires the pulse of its youngest citizens. While young Europeans are more connected than ever – mobilising digitally for climate action and social justice – their trust in democratic institutions remains alarmingly fragile. To strengthen the European project, we must move from symbolic engagement to active civic impact and build a bridge between youthful energy and systemic influence.

In this context, the European Economic and Social Committee's youth event [Your Europe, Your Say! \(YEYS\) 2026](#), taking place on 19-20 March, arrives at a pivotal moment for youth democracy in Europe. This year's edition will explore *Meaningful Connections · Active Participation · Democratic Engagement*. The thematic focus for 2026 will be structured around the following key pillars:

- Shaping tomorrow;
- Civic engagement & participatory democracy;
- Digital transformation, AI & youth;
- Social cohesion & inclusion;
- Climate action & sustainability;
- and Mental health & wellbeing.

YEYS 2026 creates a unique platform for young Europeans to connect across borders, [engage directly with decision-makers](#) and transform civic enthusiasm into concrete democratic participation. The youth assembly will conclude by identifying the top priorities, which will then be formulated into policy recommendations. The EESC will ensure that the proposals are channelled into the Committee's future advisory work and contribute in the consultations on the

next EU Youth Strategy.

However, true participation is not just about being invited to the room; it's about having the power to make an impact on the direction of the conversation. When young Europeans experience a system that listens, hears and acts, they don't just participate – they invest their future in the democratic process.

Firstly, it's important to secure transparent feedback – decision-makers must explain which youth proposals are adopted and, crucially, why others are not. Secondly, early-stage involvement – impact happens at the drafting table. Young people must be partners from the inception of policy, not just reviewers of a finished product. And finally, tangible results – trust is forged when ideas turn into action. This requires dedicated funding for youth-led pilot projects and local community initiatives. When a young person sees their proposal for a local green space or a digital literacy programme become reality, their disbelief transforms into civic pride.

We must unlock the impact of the [European Youth Dialogue](#) to share best practices and the full potential of the next [Erasmus+ programme](#). Furthermore, we must implement the [EU Youth Test](#) to ensure that we mainstream young perspectives across all policies at all levels (at both EU and national level). By ensuring young people have meaningful pathways to turn their passion into policy, Europe can ensure that the next generation doesn't just inherit a democracy but actively builds it.



[Katrīna LEITĀNE](#) (Latvia)

Vice-President, [EESC Youth Group](#)

Vice-President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Advocacy expert, [National Youth Council of Latvia](#)

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CURRENT AFFAIRS: Deregulation – a magic word?

5 March 2026

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By Rudolf KOLBE, Vice-President of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions and the Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineering Consultants

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The [European Commission announces](#) that a solution has finally been found: fewer rules, more competitiveness. We just need to 'simplify', relieve companies of reporting obligations, speed up procedures – and Europe's engine will be up and running again. Sounds appealing. Almost as if 'deregulation' were a magic word.

'Does this mean new guardrails for the [single market](#)?' – 'No, we're dismantling the old guardrails.' In Brussels, this means '[Omnibus](#)' and 'easing the burden'. But magic words can have side effects. If simplification is pushed through without a clean impact assessment, without broad consultation and to the applause of well-organised lobbies, the cutting of red tape will quickly result in less democracy.

I share the concern that a wave of deregulation can weaken Europe, especially when it comes about as a result of external pressure. Europe is not a military superpower. Our strength lies in how we arrange our single market and set standards: for health, the environment, fair competition and fundamental digital rights. Relinquishing this ability makes us more dependent – on supply chains, on platforms and on US tech giants. This dependency is no less dangerous than dependency on supposedly cheap Russian energy or Chinese critical raw materials.

For this very reason, deviating too far from the [European Green Deal](#) poses a significant risk to our climate objectives . Treating targets as ‘ballast’ holding us back means losing credibility and the predictability needed for investments. Hastily watering down rules on sustainability, supply chains and transparency does not amount to the neutral cutting of red tape, but rather sends a signal: Europe’s aspirations are up for negotiation.

However, it is true that not every rule is a shield; some are trip wires. Europe has created a network of standards that can lead to double reporting, ambiguity and high transaction costs – especially for SMEs. Competitiveness is created by clarity, stability and speed in permitting, not by frantically backtracking on targets. This saves time, money and nerves – and encourages investment rather than frustration.

The crucial question is therefore not whether or not to regulate. Instead we must ask which rules protect the common good – and which hinder it without measurable benefits. Simplification means preserving objectives and improving pathways; deregulation is about undermining objectives and obscuring responsibility.

Having fewer rules will not make Europe strong. It will become strong by having better rules – and the courage to defend them.



[Rudolf KOLBE](#) (Austria)

Vice-President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Member of the Executive Board, [Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions](#) (BUKO)

Member of the Executive Board, [Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineering Consultants](#)

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Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism renewal: Protecting Europe's clean industrial future

5 March 2026

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By Kadi RISTKOK, EESC study group member on the 'Revision of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism' and member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Estonian Cleantech Association

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WHAT IS THE CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM?

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism ([CBAM](#)) is the European Union's tool to ensure that the EU's climate ambition is not undermined by [carbon leakage](#). It applies a carbon price to certain imported goods, reflecting the emissions generated during their production, and aligns this cost with the price paid by EU producers under the EU Emissions Trading System ([EU ETS](#)).

The renewal of the CBAM, which is the subject of our European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) upcoming opinion [NAT/976](#) (Expected adoption 18-19 March 2026), comes at a decisive moment for Europe's clean industrial development.

As free allocation under the EU ETS is progressively phased out, protecting the credibility of the carbon price becomes increasingly important. CBAM's immediate function is to safeguard European industrial competitiveness

while supporting EU ETS in building a more resilient industry and preventing carbon leakage. More broadly, it should serve as a tool to encourage global alignment with Europe's ambition, supporting a clean economy transition that strengthens competitiveness while delivering shared benefits beyond the Union.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE CBAM RENEWAL?

For clean industry and clean technology companies, the clean economy transition must be both credible and manageable. [Decarbonisation](#) requires long-term investment, adjustments across supply chains and the gradual improvement of emissions data systems. This transformation cannot occur overnight. Well-designed flexibilities within CBAM are therefore not a concession to lower ambition, but a necessary condition for making the transition effective in practice.

The extension of CBAM to [downstream goods](#) reflects the need to close circumvention risks and reinforce the EU ETS across value chains. Yet many companies, particularly SMEs and innovative scale-ups, operate in complex manufacturing environments where verified emissions information is not yet consistently available. Transitional arrangements, proportionate reporting obligations and pragmatic use of default values give companies the time and practical means to adapt. A smooth transition enables industry to align with higher climate ambition without unnecessary disruption.

Flexibility should be understood as a stabilising mechanism. Clear phases of implementation, predictable methodologies and workable compliance pathways provide the certainty required for investment in clean technologies. Abrupt or overly rigid application, by contrast, risks creating uncertainty that could slow innovation and weaken Europe's industrial momentum at a time when global competition in clean technologies is intensifying.

Robust [anti-circumvention](#) measures remain essential to preserve trust in both CBAM and the EU ETS. At the same time, their application must be transparent and based on clearly defined criteria. Exceptional measures or temporary adjustments should reinforce stability, not introduce unpredictability.

Ultimately, the success of the CBAM renewal will depend on its ability to support the EU ETS while allowing Europe's industry to transition in an orderly and competitive manner. When ambition is combined with appropriate flexibilities and adequate means for adaptation, decarbonisation can become a driver of resilience, innovation and global industrial leadership.

MY TAKE ON THE NEXT STEPS:

1. Finalise the CBAM legislative adjustments and implementation framework (Short term: 2025–2026)

[CBAM Regulation \(EU\) 2023/956 – legal framework](#)

2. Ensure a smooth transition for industry through proportionate flexibilities

[European Commission guidance on default values and transitional reporting](#)

3. Strengthen anti-circumvention measures while preserving predictability

[Commission proposal on downstream products and anti-circumvention \(COM\(2025\) 989\)](#)

4. Align CBAM implementation with industrial and clean technology investment

[European Commission – Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism overview](#)

5. Review effectiveness and global impact (Medium term: 2026–2027)

[Commission CBAM review and implementing acts package](#)



[Kädi RISTKOK](#) (Estonia)

EESC study group member, EESC opinion [NAT/976 on the Revision of the carbon border adjustment mechanism \(CBAM\)](#), to be presented and adopted at the EESC plenary session in March 2026

Member, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Chief Executive Officer, [Estonian Cleantech Association](#)

Executive Director, [Cleantech for Baltics](#)

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REFLECTIONS BY CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS: Building resilient communities

5 March 2026

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By Kata TÜTTŐ, President of the European Committee of the Regions

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RESILIENCE: THE PRICE OF STABILITY

Resilience sounds reassuring. It suggests strength, safety, continuity. But what do we actually mean when we use the word?

For cities and regions, resilience is the capacity to absorb shocks without losing core functions. It means that when a flood hits, public transport still runs. When storms arrive, waste is collected, drinking water is safe, hospitals function. It is about reserves and buffers, parallel pipelines and storage capacity – but also about preparedness, social trust and leadership. Resilience is not only infrastructure. It is a mindset for dealing with uncertainty.

It has become one of Europe's trending buzzwords because volatility is no longer the exception. Events once described as 'once in 100 years' now occur within a single political mandate. Resilience means preparing not only for what we have already experienced, but for what we have never seen before. It requires a toolkit and a mental framework to face the unfamiliar.

But resilience has a price.

Redundant pipelines. Retention basins that may fill only once a decade. Floodplains that could have eased housing shortages. Backup energy systems, generators, continuous staff training for emergencies that may not occur for years. Money invested in buffers is money not spent on eye-catching growth projects, tax cuts or ribbon-cutting infrastructure.

Here lies the tension with another trending word: competitiveness. Competitiveness seeks optimisation – fewer duplications, lower costs, streamlined systems, risk-taking. Resilience accepts inefficiency – redundancy, reserves, regulation, risk minimisation. One mindset primed for efficiency, the other for survival. Leaders must navigate between them.

Resilience forces us to confront difficult questions: What risks are we willing to accept? Who do we protect? Are we ready to invest more today to reduce danger tomorrow? What are we willing to sacrifice now to remain stable in the future?

As uncertainty about the future grows, this discipline of choice becomes not theoretical – but defining.



[Kata Tüttö](#), President of the European Committee of the Regions ([CoR](#))

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REFLECTIONS BY CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS: Building resilient communities

5 March 2026

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Debating the future © ECOLISE

By Leida RIJNHOUT, Director of ECOLISE (European Network of Community-led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability)

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ECOLISE – A SYMPHONY OF LOCAL VOICES,

ACTIONS AND IDEAS

In a world where fake news abounds and autocrats are gaining power, it is difficult to find your way and feel sure about what is right and what is wrong. The world and its people face multiple social and environmental crises, which call for a fundamental transformation of our established societal systems. There is an overload of information and choices to make. People feel increasingly insecure, depressed, anxious or lost.

The feeling of being part of a community helps people to face complex challenges. Reinforcing social networks on the ground, while defining collective objectives and joint actions, increases trust, safety and mental health. The importance of conscious and active local groups is often undermined as being “too local” to make the global shift to sustainability. This is a huge misunderstanding.

[ECOLISE](#), a European network of community-led initiatives, demonstrates that bringing together local voices and citizen power is key to building resilient communities and nation states. Communities form the backbone of economic activity and political culture in a country. If people feel safe, connected to one another and rooted in their environment, this fosters greater well-being, empathy and inclusiveness —and ultimately leads to more democracy.

ECOLISE members aim to improve people’s lives while respecting nature’s limits. More than two million Europeans are already involved in the energy transition, greening urban spaces, community-supported agriculture, and sharing initiatives such as car-sharing and time banks. These initiatives are not only hands-on; they are also strong, workable ideas for locally-driven sustainable development. Social innovation may be just as important as technological innovation — it needs to go hand in hand to build resilient communities.

Achieving the system change our global economy needs depends on the meaningful involvement of diverse local groups, including indigenous and rural communities and active neighbourhoods. Efforts to advocate for more top-down legal frameworks, regulation and enabling policies will only succeed if there is broad ownership and engagement across society. Transformative change requires both individual and collective action. We must support people to become active changemakers — as citizens, as active consumers, within their communities, and in their working lives.

Read more and sign:



[Leida RIJNHOUT](#), Director of [ECOLISE](#) (European Network of Community-led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability)

Youth Work for All: Advancing inclusive integration

5 March 2026

[→ READ ONLINE](#)



By Michael McLOUGHLIN, Member of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing Youth Work Ireland

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Through the [Youth Work for All – Advancing Inclusive Integration](#) project, *Youth Work Ireland* is working to strengthen inclusion for some of the most marginalised young people in local communities – those with disabilities, those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and those living in rural or remote areas.

By focusing on three specific groups of vulnerable young people, the project has a clear focus and a purposeful structure for activities. This targeted approach helps keep goals clearly defined and relevant.

The project seeks to reinforce connections between research, evidence and policy, and contributes to the sharing, development and implementation of innovative tools and practices at a local, regional, national and transnational

level that highlight the quality and relevance of youth work methods as effective tools for realising inclusive integration.



The project involves and consults young people from diverse backgrounds as well as youth workers and practitioners who have experience and expertise working with diverse groups to explore and capture the most effective ways of working and empowering marginalised young people. This will include young people's lived experiences (through co-design, life trajectory interviews and local workshops) to emphasis authentic insight into barriers and possible solutions. The co-design aspect of this project ensures an exciting element of this project's journey.

The *Youth Work for All – Advancing Inclusive Integration* project officially began on 1 January 2026 and will run for a period of two years, concluding in December 2027. The project is currently reaching its first major milestone with the [Kick-Off Training Seminar taking place in Bucharest](#), hosted by Centrul pentru Dezvoltare Comunitară Durabilă. This seminar brings together youth workers and practitioners from all partner organisations – [Youth Work Ireland](#) (Ireland), [MUDEM Refugee Support Association](#) (Turkey), [Centrul pentru Dezvoltare Comunitară Durabilă](#) (Romania), [ERYICA](#) (EU) and [Kezdzj Velünk](#) (Hungary). The event examines current youth work policies and practices, showcases innovative methodologies for inclusion and provides a collaborative space for sharing experiences, co-designing approaches and identifying priorities for future policy and practice.

As a [KA220 Erasmus+ Youth Project](#), the initiative focuses primarily on supporting youth workers in co-developing practical tools, resources and evidence that strengthen inclusive integration. Activities will be implemented across Ireland, Turkey, Romania and Hungary, with findings intended to benefit the wider network of the European Youth

Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA). Over the coming months, the project will engage young people through participatory workshops, life-trajectory interviews and co-design sessions, while planned activities for 2026 include further training events, pilot testing of new tools and the development of policy recommendations. Although young people do not apply individually to the programme, they will be actively involved through local youth organisations participating in project activities in their respective regions.



[Michael McLoughlin](#) (Ireland)

Member, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Head of Advocacy and Communications, [Youth Work Ireland](#)

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NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: Civil Society Organisations' Group adopts priorities for 2025-2028 term

5 March 2026

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THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS' GROUP OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE (EESC) ADOPTED ITS PRIORITIES FOR THE 2025-2028 TERM UNDER THE HEADLINE "*STRIVING FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES, THE BEATING HEART OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY*". THE PRIORITIES ARE SUBJECT TO REVIEW ACCORDING TO DEVELOPMENTS:

EMPOWERING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES BY:

- amplifying community voices and increasing the democratic legitimacy of the EU;
- supporting bottom-up approaches;
- advocating a just demographic transition and intergenerational fairness;
- supporting an inclusive labour market and reinforcing the social economy as a key model of inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship.

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY BY:

- promoting participatory democracy and civil society engagement in EU policy-making in all policy areas, with a particular focus on youth engagement. This means working towards open, transparent, regular and structured civil dialogue, as set out in [Article 11 of the Treaty on EU](#);
- ensuring that civil society is fully embedded in the EU agenda and can act as an early-warning voice in a rapidly changing world;
- stepping up outreach to young people and continuing to cooperate with civil society organisations at both European and national level;
- encouraging intergenerational cooperation.

CONTRIBUTING TO PEACE AND A RESILIENT CIVIL SOCIETY BY:

- promoting EU values as enshrined in [Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union](#);
- working towards the integration of civil society into preparedness, prevention and crisis-response strategies so that civil society organisations are equal partners in the civil preparedness framework;
- supporting efforts on civil defence, reconstruction and reconciliation;
- countering hybrid threats, disinformation and attempts to undermine democratic institutions.

PROMOTING A SUSTAINABLE AGENDA BY:

- advocating putting the United Nations' [Agenda 2030 for sustainable development](#) and its [sustainable development goals](#), as well as the [European Green Deal](#), back towards the top of the EU's policy agenda;
- committing to the sustainable agenda since this is the Europe's best recipe for staying true to its commitments and values while enhancing prosperity, solidarity, equality, democracy and inclusiveness;
- supporting the European Commission's efforts to address major gaps in environmental policy, particularly in water resilience, chemicals and the circular economy;
- championing an EU that leaves nobody behind, and working towards efficient solutions for the cost-of-living crisis, including the [first-ever European Anti-Poverty Strategy](#);
- calling for the resubmission of the [Directive on European Cross-Border Associations](#), which is essential to strengthening the European civic space.

STANDING UP FOR AN EU 2028-2034 BUDGET ALIGNED WITH A CLEAR EUROPEAN AMBITION, DELIVERING FOR DEMOCRACY, CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION, BY:

- monitoring, contributing to and engaging with the discussions on the EU's [next long-term budget](#);
- promoting adequate and future-proof EU funding that supports core European policies for current and future generations;
- advocating dedicated funding streams that recognise civil society organisations as partners;
- ensuring the rigorous application of the partnership principle throughout the funding lifecycle.



NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: Contributions from the Civil Society Organisations' Group to Civil Society Week 2026



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The third edition of Civil Society Week took place from 2 to 5 March 2026 at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in Brussels, under the theme *People, Democracy, Resilience – Our Future!*

Members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group actively contributed to the discussions, taking part in several panel debates and exchanges throughout the week. Read our

members' key messages.

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The third edition of [Civil Society Week](#) took place from 2 to 5 March 2026 at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in Brussels, under the theme *People, Democracy, Resilience – Our Future!*

At a pivotal moment for Europe, the EESC brought together a broad range of voices — including civil society organisations, citizens, EU institutions, national Economic and Social Councils and stakeholders from across Europe, as well as candidate countries — to reflect on how to strengthen democracy, civic participation and social cohesion. Over four days, high-level debates, participatory sessions and interactive workshops focused on supporting people, protecting democratic values and preparing the Union for the future.

Members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group actively contributed to these discussions, taking part in several panel debates and exchanges throughout the week. Read below, a wrap-up of their interventions.

EDUCATING CITIZENSHIP FOR RESILIENT SOCIETIES

Pavel Trantina

”

Societal resilience emerges when individuals can transcend self-interest, cooperate, and trust the collective good. Personal resilience grows through daily self-development, perseverance, and constructive challenge. In educating for both, civil society organisations have an essential role to play.

”

WHAT HOLDS US TOGETHER? THE POWER OF SOCIAL COHESION

Ina Agafonova

”

Social cohesion begins with trust, and trust is built through meaningful participation. Civil dialogue is not a formality; it is a cornerstone of democratic legitimacy and societal resilience, particularly in times of crisis.

”

Bogomil Nikolov

”

Social exclusion is the result of systemic governance failures, not individual shortcomings. When such exclusion persists, it erodes social cohesion, undermines trust in institutions, and weakens democratic values.

”

MIND THE GAPS: COMPLETING THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY SHIELD

Christian Moos

”

As extremists grow louder, the democratic centre must stand firm. The European Democracy Shield should unite moderates across Europe and translate our shared values into real, enforceable safeguards.

”

CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGY AND PLATFORM – WHAT IS NEXT?

Vice-President [Pietro Barbieri](#)

”

We are part of the process of building the Platform for Civil Dialogue—both as the EESC and as the Civil Society Organisations’ Group. Now is the time to roll up our sleeves and help shape something that is truly participatory and meaningful.

”

BUILDING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

[Ewa Kulik-Bielińska](#)

”

The EU Strategy for civil society, adopted in November 2025 in the response to over 10 years advocacy by CSOs across the EU, is a symbolic yet important recognition of the fundamental role civil society plays in promoting, strengthening and defending our democracies. Acknowledging the growing challenges, restrictions, and threats faced by CSOs and human-rights defenders in both EU member states and enlargement countries, the Strategy commits to elevating civil society as a partner in governance and policymaking at EU and national levels by enhancing and supplementing civic-dialogue frameworks, strengthening protection mechanisms, and expanding and streamlining funding opportunities to ensure civil society can fulfil its function freely, independently and effectively in an open, safe, and enabling civic space. It is now up to CSOs, the EESC, and the European Commission to ensure that these commitments are translated into practical, results-oriented structures and processes, so that the Strategy does not remain merely another well-intentioned declaration.

”

[Giuseppe Guerini](#)

”

Social economy entities in Europe constitute a genuine social infrastructure that nourishes and roots democratic principles in real life, not only through the promotion of active citizenship, social solidarity and commitment to the common good, but also by embodying them, making the economy democratic too.

In this era of enormous wealth concentration and growing inequality, cooperatives are the main form of enterprise that distributes wealth where it is created, plays a fundamental role in combating poverty and is based on corporate governance founded on the principle of democratic participation.

President [Cillian Lohan](#)

We strongly support the European Commission Democracy package - in particular the Democracy Shield - but the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions must be fully involved, for civil society empowerment and all citizens' benefit. That's why we back the Civil Society Platform.

FUNDING CIVIC SPACE: THE ROLE OF THE EU AND OTHER DONORS

[Elena Calistru](#)

Europe is rearming, and rightly so. But the countries that lost their democracies didn't fall to tanks — they fell to captured courts, captured media, and civic organizations that ran out of money mid-battle. The next MFF will show whether we've understood that lesson: defence spending and democratic infrastructure are not two separate budget lines. They're the same investment.

VOLUNTEERING & SOCIAL ECONOMY: BUILDING UP EUROPE'S RESILIENCE

Vice-President [Ariane Rodert](#)

Volunteers, civil society and social economy organisations are crucial in strengthen Europe's resilience, both when a crisis hits by mobilizing rapid support, and through their social mission and day-to-day activities fostering social cohesion, inclusive participation and providing locally rooted solutions that help communities adapt, recover, and thrive. To fully capture their contributions to resilience, civil society space must be better protected and expanded

with enabling policies and support to ensure meaningful engagement.

INVISIBLE WORK, VISIBLE IMPACT — TO MARK INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Vice-President [Pietro Barbieri](#)

There is no doubt that care work is largely carried out by women from non-European countries. They form an indispensable workforce, yet their contribution is often inadequately recognised—frequently excluded from national collective bargaining agreements and, in some cases, from national regulatory frameworks altogether. Much more must be done to protect these workers from exploitation and abuse in all its forms.

STAY TUNED FOR THE CONCLUSIONS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY WEEK 2026, WHICH WILL BE REVEALED DURING THE NEXT EESC PLENARY SESSION ON [18-19 MARCH 2026](#).

EESC PLENARY: Interview with CCMI President Alain Coheur on the potential of the sodium battery manufacturing sector

5 March 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



CCMI President Alain Coheur © EU/EESC

We spoke with the CCMI President, representing the National Union of Socialist Mutuality Societies of Belgium (Solidaris) in the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, about the EESC opinion [CCMI/250](#).

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WE SPOKE WITH THE CCMI PRESIDENT ABOUT THE EESC OPINION [CCMI/250](#) 'ENHANCING EU STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AND DEVELOPING A GREENER AND BLUER ECONOMY: THE POTENTIAL OF THE SODIUM BATTERY MANUFACTURING SECTOR'

WHAT ARE THE THREE MAIN FINDINGS OF THIS OPINION?

With this opinion, the EESC's Consultative Commission on Industrial Change ([CCMI](#)) drew attention to a new topic that is highly relevant for the future of European industry and in the framework of the [Preparedness Union](#). The rapporteurs highlighted advantages of this new technology over other existing solutions and its potential for the EU.

Sodium batteries rely on a widely available raw material in Europe, unlike alternatives such as lithium batteries. Sodium is abundant, inexpensive and available throughout Europe. These batteries can help the EU reduce its external dependencies and foster its strategic autonomy. For the environment sodium batteries are also much more advantageous, and their production would not pose the same problems as the mining and extraction of lithium.

I would also highlight that developing a European industry of such batteries is a goal which is perfectly aligned with some of the priorities of our Committee. Being a more environmentally-friendly technology, a circular sodium battery ecosystem can assist decarbonisation efforts and support the objectives of the [EU Green Deal](#). At the same time, this technology can provide sustainable use of the sodium resulting from desalination efforts linked to the [EU Blue Deal](#), preventing this surplus from threatening biodiversity.

Lastly, I would stress the urgency of the EU developing a proper strategy and investing in a sodium battery industry, to make the sector competitive and a strategic asset. We are already losing the lithium battery production race to other players (such as China and South Korea), and if we do not take action the same will happen when it comes to sodium batteries.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OR PROPOSALS OF THE OPINION?

To establish a competitive and sovereign sodium manufacturing industry, it is imperative that the European Commission updates its industrial pathway for batteries, in cooperation with other stakeholders and the EESC. Sodium batteries must be included, but there is also a need to address workforce and skills requirements and to look at the battery ecosystem on its own rather than just as part of the components of the automotive sector.

In addition, we call for a stronger partnership between governments, industry and academia to strengthen research and development ([R&D](#)) efforts, but also for public incentives and policies to support the investment needed. It is equally important to leverage existing knowledge by keeping the current lithium factories running and investing in both technologies in order to make the EU a global leader in the field of batteries.

AFTER THE ADOPTION OF THIS OPINION, WHAT WILL YOU DO TO PROMOTE IT?

We have worked closely with the European Commission and sodium batteries stakeholders on this opinion, and we have also developed our contacts with the Batteries European Partnership Association ([BEPA](#)) on this topic and more broadly on the battery industry.

We have also commissioned a study on the potential of sodium batteries for the energy efficiency of households and businesses. For example, in the case of the [energy shutdown in Portugal and Spain](#) (April 2025), we want to explore how this new technology can become an asset in making communities and businesses better prepared and more resilient to such events.

In view of all this, at the CCMI we are convinced that the sector has key potential for the coming years. We will make work on sodium batteries one of our flagship initiatives, exploring their different applications and conducting substantial follow-up with other EU institutions and stakeholders.

The EESC opinion on 'Enhancing EU strategic autonomy and developing a greener and bluer economy: the potential of the sodium battery manufacturing sector' was presented and adopted at the EESC plenary session in February 2026.

Read it at: <https://link.europa.eu/FgChXG>

[Alain COHEUR](#) (Belgium)

EESC [CCMI](#) President

Member, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Director of European and International Affairs, National Union of Socialist Mutuality Societies ([Solidaris](#)).

WATCH THE VIDEO STATEMENT BY THE CCMI PRESIDENT ON THE EESC OPINION
CCMI/250:



EESC PLENARY: Statement on the adopted opinion 'Roadmap towards Nature Credits'

5 March 2026

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By Arnaud SCHWARTZ, rapporteur for the EESC opinion NAT/961 and member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing France Nature Environnement

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Statement by rapporteur Arnaud SCHWARTZ on the EESC opinion NAT/961 'Roadmap towards Nature Credits', which was adopted by the EESC plenary on 19 February 2026.

Opinion NAT/961: [Roadmap towards Nature Credits | EESC](#)

EESC PLENARY: The EESC and its Civil Society Organisations' Group continue to push for a solution to Europe's housing crisis

5 March 2026

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EESC plenary debate on 'From ambition to action: a European Affordable Housing Plan delivering for the

At its plenary session on 19 February, the EESC held a debate on housing with guest speakers from the European Commission, the EU Urban Agenda Housing Partnership, the International Union of Tenants (IUT), and the Climate Action Network Europe. Read the key messages of the members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group.

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Following the European Commission's presentation of the [European Affordable Housing Plan](#) last December, the European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)) has gathered together relevant stakeholders to take stock of the ongoing housing emergency and discuss a way forward. The Committee aims to tackle speculation, address investment gaps and make sure businesses remain competitive.

Dan Jørgensen, European Commissioner for Energy and Housing, contributed with a video message to the EESC plenary debate. Joining the debate were also Matthew Baldwin, Deputy Director-General of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy and leader of the Commission's Housing Task Force, Michaela Kauer, Director of the Brussels office of the City of Vienna and coordinator of the EU Urban Agenda Housing Partnership, Marie Linder, President of the International Union of Tenants and President of the Swedish Tenants' Union, and Chiara Martinelli, Director of Climate Action Network Europe.

"Housing is first and foremost a social issue," said EESC President [Séamus Boland](#), "but it is no longer only that. It is an economic issue. A demographic issue. A competitiveness issue. This is why tackling the housing crisis is one of the key priorities of my term of office."

In the margins of the plenary, [Cillian Lohan](#), President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, emphasised that his group had long advocated efforts to address the housing crisis and fully supported the European Affordable Housing Plan. He underlined the importance of the EESC's participation in the first-ever EU Summit of Heads of State and Government, from which the European Housing Alliance is expected to emerge later this year.

[Rudolf Kolbe](#), group vice-president, underlined the need to move from symbolic politics to action. "Every Member State needs to have a reliable monitoring system for vacant housing and effective instruments against speculative vacant housing. Apart from increasing the number of square meters and surface area, the quality standards of the ["New European Bauhaus Initiative"](#) need to be applied to ensure that projects can be accepted and that the cost-of-living drops. Renovations cannot lead to evictions."

[Baiba Miltoviča](#) drew attention to the need to increase the renovation rate of building stock in the EU and of changing the way we renovate buildings. She mentioned that the EESC will work on an EU construction strategy, stating that "we need to think about sustainability and innovations and scaling up modular offsite construction, promoting circular materials, addressing labour shortages through training, and aiming for more greening and a more digitalised sector."

[Elena Calistru](#), current President of the EESC's [ECO section](#), spoke about the plan's financing options and the EU budget proposals for the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework ([MFF](#)), noting: "we need to use the opportunity of the MFF negotiations to put our money where our mouth is. ["Cohesion policy"](#) is the only infrastructure in terms of financing at EU level that has the territorial dimension and the necessary outreach to make this plan a really valuable and impactful one. The proposed budget allocation is not enough to face the challenges we have."

[Kinga Joó](#) saw a relation between the housing crisis and declining family sizes. While welcoming the Commission's focus on the affordability of housing, she urged for efforts to also address other specific needs of large families, stating that "accessibility and affordability is also a right of those children who are now living in crowded apartments. In some cases, this is every second child in some countries in Europe."

[Laura Albu](#) spoke about housing in the context of domestic violence and stressed that "the European Affordable Housing Plan must be the safety net of women fleeing violence with their children". In Romania, women fleeing from violence desperately sought doors that lock from the inside. "Housing is a fundamental right, but for these women, it is the right to life itself. Let's ensure our plan doesn't just build units, but creates sanctuaries."

[Read the EESC's press release](#)

[Watch the debate](#)

EESC PLENARY: EESC champions sodium batteries for Europe's industrial and energy future

5 March 2026

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EESC rapporteurs Paul RÜBIG and Hervé JEANNIN (from left to right) © EU/EESC

At its plenary session on 19 February, the EESC held a debate on sodium batteries with guest speakers from the European Commission and the Batteries European Partnership Association (BEPA). The debate was linked to the presentation and adoption of its opinion CCMI/250 *Enhancing EU strategic autonomy and developing a greener and bluer economy: the potential of the sodium battery manufacturing sector*. Read the

key messages of the members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group.

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The European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)) considers sodium batteries a strategically important technology for Europe and calls for them to become a key element of the EU's industrial strategy, as highlighted during the Committee's plenary session debate on the potential of these batteries, held on 19 February, and in its latest adopted [opinion](#).

Marc Lemaître, Director-General of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, and Fabrice Stassin, Secretary-General of the Batteries European Partnership Association (BEPA), took part in the debate.

Opening the debate, EESC President [Séamus Boland](#) said: "Sodium batteries, and batteries more broadly, are key for the EU's competitive edge, and it is urgent that the next ["Multi-Annual Financial Framework"](#) recognises this by providing the necessary funds for the sector."

Several members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group engaged in the discussion:

[Alain Coheur](#), president of the Committee's [CCMI](#), expressed his view that "Sodium batteries are not just an alternative energy storage solution; they represent a real opportunity for our industry in the context of the ["EU Preparedness Union Strategy"](#), the ["EU Blue"](#) and ["Green Deal"](#), and increasing our strategic autonomy." The adoption of the Committee's opinion on the potential of the sodium battery manufacturing sector would not be the end of the journey, but only the beginning: "Developing a competitive sodium battery industry in Europe will require political will, coordinated action and strong investment."

[Corina Murafa Benga](#) considered the clean tech sector an opportunity to increase EU competitiveness, provided the EU managed to move quickly beyond research and development to deployment. "We must stimulate both supply and demand. Targets, enablers and incentives need to address both the manufacturing and the demand side. Simply subsidising only production will not work." She concluded by warning that if new technologies were not affordable, customers would not adopt them.

[Pietro Vittorio Barbieri](#), group vice-president, said the development of sodium batteries gave people with disabilities hope for day-to-day mobility solutions that came with fewer problems and risks than current solutions. In terms of their practical development, he emphasised that mobility devices were often produced by SMEs, which do not have the capacity to pass complex tests required for lithium-ion batteries. Mr Barbieri said: "We need to avoid this in the case of sodium batteries."

While [Ina Agafanova](#) saw an opportunity to shape the emerging value chain in line with the EU's strategic priorities – namely sustainability, resilience and industrial balance – she urged: "The development of sodium batteries must involve cohesion regions, peripheral economies and smaller Member States from the outset. We need to link research centres, SMEs, industrial conversion sites and port-based logistics into an integrated value chain. If we succeed, sodium batteries will not only strengthen Europe's technological sovereignty, they will also reinforce its

internal cohesion."

This plenary debate set the stage for a broader EESC focus on sodium batteries, with upcoming opinions, stakeholder debates and a dedicated study aimed at placing sodium batteries firmly on Europe's industrial agenda and supporting a more resilient, competitive and sustainable economy.

[Read the EESC's press release](#)

[Watch the debate](#)

EESC PLENARY: Four years on: Ensuring recovery and hope for Ukraine's younger generation

5 March 2026

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Yaryna Bohun (Ukrainian student), Olha Fozekosh (Ukrainian teacher) and Baiba Tavaresa (EEAS) (from left to right) © EU/EESC

At its plenary session on 18 February, the EESC held a debate on Russia's war against Ukraine and its devastating toll on children and youth with guest speakers from the European Commission, the GLOBSEC Kyiv Office, UNICEF, UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission, Save the Children, the centre of civil education 'Almenda', the Regional Centre for Human Rights, and Olena Zelenska, the first lady of Ukraine. Read the key messages of the members of the EESC Civil Society

Organisations' Group.

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Ahead of the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)) placed a strong focus on the war's lasting and complex impact on children and young people. On 18 February, the Committee organised a plenary debate with Yaryna Bohun (Ukrainian student), Olha Fozekosh (Ukrainian teacher), Baiba Tavaresa (EEAS) and Maryna Domushkina (GLOBSEC Kyiv Office). The debate was joined remotely by Munir Mammadzade (UNICEF), Danielle Bell (UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission), Rachel Watkins (Save the Children), Mariia Sulialina (Centre of civil education 'Almenda') and Kateryna Rashevskaya (Regional Centre for Human Rights). Olena Zelenska, the first lady of Ukraine, contributed with a video message.

The debate concluded with a call for coordinated European action, with strong involvement from civil society and international partners, to help young Ukrainians recover and look to the future with hope.

"We will stand by Ukraine and its future for as long as it takes," said EESC President [Séamus Boland](#), reaffirming the Committee's unwavering support for Ukraine. "We must do everything possible to ensure that Ukrainian children receive the support they need. They deserve to grow up in safe and dignified conditions. They will be essential to Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction."

Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group engaged in the debate:

[Lidija Pavić-Rogošić](#), Vice-President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, shared her experience from the impact of the Croatian War of Independence on children. "War leaves lasting wounds on children. The EU must ensure that Ukrainian children do not just survive but thrive. It must invest in psychosocial support, safe schools and local civil society organisations that help restore stability."

[Andris Gobiņš](#), member of the EESC's [EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform](#), began his intervention with an apology to Ukrainian children and young people. Speaking about the situation in the occupied territories of Ukraine and the impact on children and young people, he urged: "This terrible Russian aggression has to stop, and we have to do much more. Industry should stop delivering parts of drones and buying Russian oil".

[Ewa Kulik-Bielińska](#), also a member of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform, condemned Russia's deliberate acts of war against the Ukrainian people and warned against succumbing to support fatigue. "We have to do everything not to engulf in this sentiment and we have to resist this, well-intentioned rush of some politicians to end the war quickly, even on Russian terms and at the cost of Ukrainian territory. The decision to end the war should be made by Ukrainians and Ukrainians alone."

[Luca Jahier](#) reported on his recent mission to Ukraine and three lessons learned from it: "First, we have to go there to see, to listen, to be close to our Ukrainian fellows, to tell with our bodies we are with you. Second, we should engage directly to support in any concrete way, for instance schools, kindergartens, and cultural centres working for rehabilitation. Third, prosecution of crimes must be relentless."

[Pavel Trantina](#) said: "Ukrainians are not alone. Civil society organisations have been playing a crucial role in supporting Ukrainian children. Czech scouts, for instance, have been welcoming and integrating them in their activities and run a community centre to support families in the city of Prague."

[Read the EESC's press release](#)

[Watch the debate](#)



EESC PLENARY: Adopted opinions

5 March 2026

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The last EESC plenary sessions took place on 18-19 February 2026.

The EESC plenary adopted several opinions, some of which were drafted by members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group.

The [complete texts of all EESC opinions](#) are available in various language versions on the Committee's website.

The next EESC plenary session will take place on 18 and 19 March 2026. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#).

AGENDA: Overview

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18-19

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