



EESC Info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil society

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EDITORIAL

[Editorial](#)

Dear readers,

This October marks a new beginning for the European Economic and Social Committee, with more than 40% of members being new to the Committee.

The new members have been appointed and the next five-year mandate of the EESC is about to begin. The arrival of new members, with their unique expertise and fresh enthusiasm, has always been a major source of inspiration for the EESC.

This new political term starts at a time when the challenges facing Europe and the European Union are greater than ever. The coronavirus pandemic is continuing to wreak havoc across the continent, causing major health, social and economic crises. To add to this, the EU also finds itself in an extremely challenging geo-political environment.

The Committee makes a major contribution to achieving the priorities of the European Union by putting the citizen at the heart of its opinions and activities. Today, more than ever before, we must ensure that the voice of civil society is heard on the European stage when new policies and initiatives are drawn up. The Committee will work on key policy areas that really matter to people, including a stronger European Health Union, the European Green Deal, human rights and rule of law, the new pact for migration, and the digital transformation and the consequences of Brexit. We will debate a number of policy proposals that clearly demonstrate the need for all levels of governance to work closely together.

The EESC will play its role to the fullest by working in the Member States, by maintaining and developing its network of contacts with national and European civil society organisations, and by placing the emphasis on listening to the real experiences and aspirations of the public and of businesses.

This will be possible with the expertise already in place but also thanks to you! Your commitment, tireless input and your work as ambassadors provides genuine perspective and real added value to the Committee's activities. Hand in hand with other institutions, we can act together and find joint, cohesive solutions.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all our new members from all over Europe. I wish you all the best for the next five years, which will be decisive for the future of the European Union and of our Committee.

Gianluca Brunetti

EESC Secretary-general

DIARY DATES

3-4 November 2020, Brussels, Belgium

[Circular economy stakeholders conference](#) (online)

2-3 December 2020, Brussels, Belgium

EESC plenary session



COME & VISIT US... VIRTUALLY!

The EESC launches EESC online talks as an alternative to on-site visits

Every year, the EESC visitors' service welcomes thousands of visitors from all over Europe and the rest of the world, presenting the Committee's activities and the functioning of the European Union to a very diverse audience.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, however, the EESC is temporarily closed to external visitors.

The EESC is therefore launching **EESC Online Talks** as an alternative to traditional visits.

During these virtual meetings, visitors will have the opportunity to get acquainted with the **functioning and role of the EESC** in the EU decision-making process.

If you would like to book an **EESC Online Talk** for members of your organisation or other relevant stakeholders, please send us an email to: visitEESC@eesc.europa.eu

We look forward to hearing from you soon! (c)



EU-AFRICA: TOWARDS A MORE EQUAL PARTNERSHIP

In March 2020 the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, presented the new strategy on Africa aimed at reshaping relations between the EU and African countries. Ahead of the eagerly awaited EU-Africa Summit, the EESC has gone a step further by proposing a sustainable EU-Africa partnership based on universal human rights, democratic structures, long-term investments in infrastructure and the full inclusion of organised civil society.

This proposed new relationship between the EU and Africa cannot be built on the outdated approach of industrial policy and growth, which is harmful for the planet and has very negative social consequences. The focus, says the EESC, must be on fair distribution of wealth and the creation of welfare state structures.

In practical terms, the EESC points out that the EU development partnership must give stronger support to the creation of local public education systems at all levels, with a broadening of the Erasmus+ programme. The ultimate goal would be to avoid a "brain drain" from Africa to the EU and to reverse migration.

The outgoing president of the EESC, **Luca Jahier**, pointed out that Africa has been one of the main priorities of his term of office and highlighted that the ongoing project of building an African Continental Free Trade Area would create synergies with the EU internal market. **Mr Jahier** mentioned migration and the necessary involvement of African civil society in the upcoming EU-ACP partnership and concluded by saying that "*Africa has not lost its centrality to the EESC's agenda despite the COVID-19 pandemic*". (dgg)



THE EESC WARNS OF THE RISK OF A "GREEN" TRADE WAR

Since the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, various jurisdictions throughout the world have implemented Emissions Trading Systems (ETSs). The EU ETS is the largest and longest-standing, and is to be overhauled in line with the EU's 2030 Climate and Energy Policy Framework. In an opinion adopted at its September plenary session, the EESC provides an overview of the EU ETS and of other ETSs globally, and outlines approaches to regulate trade in this new deal for carbon markets.

In its opinion, the European Economic and Social Committee reaffirms its support for the European Green Deal, calls for the Commission to monitor local carbon markets across the globe to identify the best practices that could be useful for revising the ETS, and weighs the advantages and disadvantages of implementing an EU carbon adjustment mechanism, both in terms of the environment and of trade.

One of the key points in the opinion is that the EESC is concerned by asymmetrical carbon price levels between different jurisdictions and markets. A level playing field between industries in the EU and abroad could indeed be undermined because of the development of different emissions trading systems, but also because of competition from third markets in countries that do not have ambitious climate policies. It therefore asks the Commission in the coming months to table a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism which would shield EU energy-intensive companies from cheaper imports from third countries with no or weaker climate policies. The EESC advocates implementing carbon border adjustments in compliance with World Trade Organisation rules, so as to prevent a trade war. (dgf)

NEW PUBLICATIONS

"Dessine-moi... " online NOW!



The brochure "[Dessine-moi...](#)" is the result of 43 testimonies collected from EESC members from across the 27 EU Member States between April and September 2020. With the phrase "Dessine-moi...", borrowed from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's book *The Little Prince (Le Petit Prince)*, we asked members to tell us about "the invisible". Through their stories, the members have taken us on a journey into their private worlds, offering us a mosaic of landscapes, images, colours and sounds. We encourage you to explore these authentic stories, which are all the more important because they were lived with great intensity.

Thank you to the members who were involved in the production of this brochure:

Isabel Caño Aguilar, Milena Angelova, Giuseppe Guerini, Adam Rogalewski, Helena de Felipe Lehtonen, Gonçalo Lobo Xavier, Anne Demellenne, Cillian Lohan, Christa Schweng, Georges Dassis, Baiba Miltoviča, Maurizio Reale, Lucie Studničná, Carlos Trias Pintó, Martina Širhalová, Judith Vorbach, Lidija Pavić-Rogošić, Arnold Puech d'Alissac, José María Zufiaur Narvaiza, Yves Somville, Evangelia Kekeleki, Tellervo Kylä-Harakka-Ruonala, Sofia Björnsson, Irini Pari, Tatjana Babrauskienė, Reet Teder, Peter Schmidt, Kinga Joó, Philip von Brockdorff, Michalis Antoniou, Gunta Anča, Cristian Pîrvulescu, Claudine Otto, Giulia Barbucci, Laure Batut, Bente Sorgenfrey, Karolina Dreszer-Smalec, Dilyana Slavova, Renate Heinisch, Janusz Pietkiewicz, Jože Smole, Martin Siecker and Arnaud Schwartz. (ehp)

EESC NEWS



EESC term of office kicks off with over 40% new members

137 out of the European Economic and Social Committee's 329 members will be new to the EESC as it begins its 2020-2025 term of office in October.

Members starting out at the EESC will begin their term under the constraints of COVID-19, with social distancing and hybrid meetings still being the rule in Brussels as infection rates spike across Europe.

The EESC's 329 members are newly appointed every five years. This time **over 40% of them will be new**, bringing their fresh outlook, ideas and energy to their work alongside returning members.

Women will make up 33% of members in the new term, up from 27.30% last time and 24.70% in 2010-2015. The countries with the most women members will be Estonia, at 85.71%, and the Czech Republic and Croatia following with 66.67%. At the other end of the scale, Portugal and Cyprus have no women in their representation. Sweden has a perfect gender balance.

The youngest member is 27, while the most senior, who is to chair the plenary session which will elect the EESC's new leadership, is 76.

Members are appointed for a period of five years by the Council, based on nominations from Member States. The full list of members for the new term – to run from 2020 to 2025 – will soon be available on the EESC's website.

The 329 new or reconfirmed members are scheduled to meet for the first time in Brussels on 27 October. On **28 October**, they will elect **a new president and two vice-presidents** (the latter for Communication and Budget) for a term of two and a half years.

The position of president rotates between the Committee's three groups (Employers, Workers and Diversity Europe). The two previous presidents were elected from the Workers and Diversity Europe Groups.

Each member will join one of the three Groups, which will also elect their own Group president for a renewable two-and-a-half-year term.

The EESC's main role is to advise EU lawmakers (the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council) on draft legislation and policies through the work of its [six sections and one consultative commission](#), which cover a wide range of policy areas, such as social, economic, agricultural, environmental and transport issues. (dm)



The EESC concludes its term of office taking stock of its contribution to the European project

On 17 September, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) hosted its end-of-term ceremony during the last plenary session before its next term in October. Luca Jahier, EESC president since April 2018, expressed his gratitude to all of the members and highlighted the important contribution of the civil society organisations represented at the EESC to the European project.

In his last speech as president, **Luca Jahier** spoke about the main priorities of his term, namely sustainable development, a strengthened EU-Africa relationship, EU enlargement, and culture as a unifying element in Europe. He also highlighted the contribution made by the EESC in the last few years to tackling the challenges facing the EU: for example, the EESC had been the first European institution to propose a European

Health Union. He expressed the hope that the EESC could take an active part in the Conference on the Future of Europe proposed by the European Commission and the European Parliament.

The president of the European Commission, **Ursula von der Leyen**, sent a video message praising the "*excellent work*" done by the EESC in the last five years and its important contribution to the EU legislative procedure.

David Sassoli, president of the European Parliament, also sent a video message expressing his willingness to work more closely with the EESC to create a structured dialogue with organised civil society.

Klara Dobrev, vice-president of the European Parliament, took the floor at the EESC's plenary to highlight the fact that "*nothing can change in the world if we don't have the support of the people; and the role of the EESC is to get in touch with organised civil society, with real people, all with different backgrounds and needs*". (dof)



[COVID-19 is a ticking time bomb for Europe's tourism industry](#)

The Coronavirus pandemic is wreaking havoc on Europe's tourism sector. In six months' time half of the businesses may be gone unless the EU steps in quickly, says the European Economic and Social Committee in a new opinion.

In a [report](#) by Panagiotis Gkofas it adopted in September, the EESC says EU action is needed to keep tourism businesses afloat and their workers employed in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. And there is no time to lose: wait another six months and half of these businesses may have shut up shop.

To back up its claims, the EESC ran an [online survey](#) over the summer that involved 175 organisations representing thousands of tourism businesses, which employ hundreds of thousands of workers across the EU.

Their replies to the EESC's questionnaire painted a picture of impending disaster.

88.2% of respondents said the COVID-19 crisis had impacted them "very negatively", 80.6% predicted its effects would hit them even harder in the long term and 45% said they did not expect to survive in 2021.

The report was drawn up in response to the European Commission's Communication [Tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond](#).

The tourism sector in the EU is estimated to be losing around EUR 1 billion in revenue per month and could slough off 6.4 million jobs in 2020 as a result of COVID-19.

To kickstart the industry, the EU must first and foremost act to **restore people's confidence in the safety of travel**, says the EESC.

Pending a vaccine, the EESC supports the idea of an **EU health passport** with a harmonised Passenger Locator Form (PLF) and QR codes combined with a multilingual Health Assistance Platform.

People could use the QR code to access information and health services in the country they are visiting and have emergency access to health and social security systems.

Another top priority is to make **liquidity** available to tourism businesses and their employees as soon as possible, as the lack of cashflow is threatening their very survival.

In the EESC's view, the SURE programme to mitigate unemployment should provide relief for unemployed tourism sector workers and wage compensation for SMEs until at least 30 June 2021.

The Committee also believes the EU should set up a mechanism to **monitor the implementation of support measures**, since many of the participants in the survey complained that no financial help had been forthcoming after the EU announced it was making funds available. (dm)



[EESC gives its say on the need for an EU instrument for minimum wages](#)

The European Economic and Social Committee has adopted an opinion on [Decent minimum wages across Europe](#) in which it gave its contribution to the ongoing EU-wide debate on the subject.

This exploratory opinion was requested by the European Parliament, following the Commission's announcement that it was considering proposing a legal instrument to ensure that every EU worker is entitled to a minimum wage allowing a decent standard of living.

In the opinion, the EESC argued that fair minimum wages could help reduce poverty among working poor people, combined with person-centred, integrated and active inclusion policies.

However, it stressed that any such EU initiative must be shaped on the basis of an accurate analysis of the situation in the Member States, and must fully respect the social partners' role and autonomy, as well as the different industrial relations models.

As for the way ahead, the three groups within the EESC, representing the EU's employers, trade unions and civil society organisations, have expressed divergent views.

On behalf of the EESC's Employers' Group, rapporteur **Stefano Mallia** said: "*The Employers' Group believes that the EU has no competence over pay, and pay levels in particular, and that setting minimum wages is a national matter, done in accordance with the specific features of respective national systems. Any misguided action on the part of the EU must be avoided, especially at this particular point in time. Where the social partners need support, we should look into addressing specific needs by promoting exchanges of best practices and capacity-building and not fall into the trap of coming up with a one-size-fits all approach that could have serious negative consequences.*"

Representing the EESC Workers' Group, rapporteur **Oliver Röpke** said: "*Ensuring that workers across the EU benefit from decent minimum wages must be an essential part of the EU's recovery strategy. For the Workers' Group, it is indisputable that all workers should be protected by fair minimum wages allowing a decent standard of living wherever they work. Collective bargaining remains the most effective way of guaranteeing fair wages and must also be strengthened and promoted in all the Member States. We therefore welcome the Commission's recognition that there is scope for EU action to promote the role of collective bargaining in supporting minimum wage adequacy and coverage.*" (II)



[After the youth climate strikes it's time to give youth a seat at the table](#)

The climate emergency the world is facing today has mobilised millions of young people around the world, many of whom are profoundly affected by the threat it poses for their future. At the same time, it is young people who have repeatedly demonstrated their energy, creativity and motivation to challenge current unsustainable models and spur decision-makers to adopt ambitious policies. A wide gap nevertheless remains between listening to them, and actually acting upon what they say.

In this opinion, the EESC seeks to narrow this gap, considering structured and formal involvement of youth to be crucial at all stages of EU decision-making processes.

"Europe, and the world, needs ambition, leadership and action. Our systems are based on borrowing from the future, it's time now to start investing in it", stressed **Cillian Lohan**, rapporteur for the opinion.

In this context, the EESC proposes setting up **Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Tables** to be hosted by the EESC in collaboration with the Commission and the Parliament, as well as the inclusion of a youth delegate in the official EU delegation to UNFCCC COP meetings.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to redress systemic inequalities and transition towards a better future. (mr)



[World Food Day: the EU must convert the Farm to Fork strategy into meaningful and timely actions, says EESC](#)

The EESC has for years been at the forefront of promoting a comprehensive EU food policy, with the aim of providing healthy diets from sustainable food systems, linking agriculture to nutrition and ecosystem services and ensuring supply chains that protect public health for the whole of European society.

In the Committee's view, the proposed Farm to Fork strategy does not reflect these objectives sufficiently.

A crucial tool for accomplishing the strategy is the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) budget, as it represents around 40% of total EU expenditure. Therefore, the CAP budget should be increased in line with those

objectives.

The strategy also fails to address the issue of sustainable land management and access to land, one of the main obstacles to renewing the farming population. At the same time, the income-support function of CAP payments is vital and will remain so for years to come, even as steps are taken to ensure that food prices reflect true production costs.

Another major concern for EU farmers is that of having to compete with imported products that do not meet the targets set for sustainability. Therefore, the EESC calls on the EU to ensure genuinely reciprocal standards in preferential trade agreements.

Europe and the world have a long way to go to become fully sustainable. Europe has the tools and the know-how to get there. Let's prove that we also have the necessary political will and commitment, and show the way to others, says the EESC.(mr)



[Clarity on workers' status can help ensure fair work in the platform economy](#)

The European Economic and Social Committee has urged the EU and the Member States to work to clarify terms of employment in the platform economy, as a lack of standardised definitions of both workers' and employers' status can complicate the application of labour legislation and many labour protection rights.

The main concepts that need clarifying are those defining platforms as "supply and demand intermediaries" rather than "employers". This leads to workers being considered as "self-employed" rather than "employed", often stripping them of legal and social protection, including health and safety at work or employment protection, the importance of which has come to the fore in particular during the current pandemic.

As their yardstick for determining whether a worker is employed or self-employed, the EESC suggested that the EU and Member States should adopt the concept of economic dependence and subordination. It also said that the EU and Member States should give careful consideration to adopting the principle that a worker is regarded as an employee in the absence of proof to the contrary. However, genuinely self-employed workers should be able to keep that status if they so wish.

Identifying work flexibility and autonomy, supplementary income for workers and easier access for vulnerable people to employment as among the benefits brought by the platform economy, the EESC also warned of the risks, which were not be underestimated.

Aside from workers who risk having their basic rights denied, including their rights to organise themselves and to collective bargaining, there are also threats for society as a whole, given the increased risk of

competition based on undercutting social standards. This also has harmful consequences both for employers, who are subject to unsustainable competitive pressure, and for Member States, who lose tax revenue and social security contributions.

The EESC put forward its arguments in the opinion [Fair work in the platform economy](#), adopted at its September plenary session and drafted at the request of the German EU presidency. The rapporteur of the opinion was the Portuguese member **Carlos Manuel Trindade**. (ll)



[Biodiversity is the missing piece in the EU's complex strategies puzzle](#)

Since 1992, the EU has been trying to implement biodiversity strategies with no significant results. This is due mainly to poor implementation of the legal framework at national level, and to insufficient funding for the necessary measures.

The EESC welcomes the Commission's renewed commitment and efforts to develop a Biodiversity Strategy setting out targets to be reached by 2030, as one of the paths towards achieving the EU Green Deal.

According to **Antonello Pezzini** and **Lutz Ribbe**, rapporteur and co-rapporteur of the EESC report on the draft strategy, this strategy is the way forward in putting Europe's biodiversity at the heart of the post-COVID-19 recovery for the benefit of people, the climate and the planet,

bringing nature back into our lives.

The EU needs to significantly increase efforts to protect our remaining natural resources, through awareness-raising and communication campaigns. The EESC also considers it necessary to increase the size of protected areas, in particular strictly protected areas, to restore habitats and combat species decline.

The EESC also stresses that farmers and forest owners cannot be expected to bear the cost of protecting biodiversity. Rather, providing this "public good and value" should become a useful source of income for them.

On the road to the next meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity in China in 2021, much more must be done to safeguard global biodiversity. It is now time for Europe to assume its leadership role, and convince the other parties that the strategies adopted are worth being followed, urges the EESC. (mr)



[The EESC calls for an EU Action Plan to ensure fair and sustainable global supply chains](#)

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has shown the fragility of global supply chains. It has also exposed the vulnerability of workers and the adverse social, health and safety impacts of business operations in today's supply chains. At a crucial moment for concrete policy action and decision-making, the German EU Presidency and the European Parliament asked the EESC for its recommendations. In two opinions adopted at its September plenary session, it calls on the European Commission to develop a European Action Plan and bring forward mandatory due diligence obligations in global supply chains.

In an exploratory opinion, the EESC calls for a European Action Plan on human rights, decent work and sustainability in global supply chains, with binding cross-sectoral EU legislation on human rights due diligence and responsible business conduct at its forefront. A broad definition should cover human rights, including workers' and trade union rights, and build on a range of international instruments.

In parallel to its work on the Action Plan, the EESC has been providing its advice to the European Parliament on a European legal initiative introducing mandatory due diligence on human rights and environmental impacts in business practices. The initiative, announced by European Commissioner Didier Reynders in April 2020 and expected in 2021, will make it legally binding for companies operating in the EU to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for the negative impacts of their activities on human and workers' rights and on the environment. (dgf)



[EU raw materials sector: EESC calls for digitalisation of mining](#)

Securing sustainable access to raw materials, including metals, industrial minerals and construction raw materials, and particularly critical raw materials (CRM), is of huge importance to the European economy, where at least 30 million jobs depend on the availability of raw materials. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the importance of digital transformation.

At its September plenary, and at a crucial moment for the implementation of the Green Deal and the EU recovery plan, the EESC adopted an own-initiative opinion [on Digital Mining in Europe: New solutions for the sustainable production of raw materials](#).

In the opinion, the EESC recommends the digitalisation of the EU raw materials sector as a unique opportunity to enhance the resilience of European industrial supply chains, to improve the environmental performance of the minerals sector and to increase transparency and dialogue with citizens and communities affected by mining activities.

The rapporteur for the opinion **Marian Krzaklewski** said: "*The digital transformation of the mining sector requires an ambitious effort to enact legal and regulatory changes, and that effort should be made under the umbrella of supranational organisations and at international law level*".

The EESC points out the importance of having a global, comprehensive minerals intelligence network to underpin the digital transformation and informed decision-making at EU level. The Joint Research Centre (JRC) is developing and maintaining a European raw materials information system, which is acknowledged by the EESC.

The EESC believes that the EU and the Member States must actively support the digital transformation of the EU mining sector. This is a crucial step in increasing the resilience of the EU industry and the raw materials value chain. Mines using digital technologies, including integrated automation, cognitive networks and real-time analytics, are more efficient, clean and safe. Reduced environmental footprints and safer environments are easier to achieve in "smart mines", and this is crucial to getting the "social licence" to operate in Europe. (ks)



[Aviation - EESC urges Commission to adopt a comprehensive recovery plan](#)

The EESC calls on the European Commission to develop a comprehensive roadmap for the recovery of European aviation as a whole, with specific resources to support all sub-sectors and their workforces.

In the opinion put together by **Thomas Kropp** and adopted at the September plenary session, the Committee argues that an ambitious, coordinated policy response is needed, making a clear distinction between an initial recovery phase, in the short term, and the need to secure the international competitiveness of the sector and a level playing field in the medium to long terms.

Speaking from the sidelines of the plenary session, **Mr Kropp** commented: "*Although aviation has faced crises before, this one is unprecedented. According to updated estimates, the sector will not fully recover before 2024. The EU and other international bodies have yet to coordinate regulatory measures to establish international standards. Aviation is not only about airlines; it is also about other important players, such as airports, air navigation service providers, ground handlers and other service providers, which all need to be considered in the search for solutions.*"

Generally speaking, the Commission must look for a proper balance between the recovery measures and the financial requirements arising from the European Green Deal, avoiding imposing additional regulatory burdens, particularly in the recovery phase, as the entire sector is extremely fragile financially.(mp)

The energy transition requires a clear vision for the future

The energy transition requires a clear political vision, as it is not just a technological issue but also a profoundly social challenge. In the opinion drafted by Lutz Ribbe and Thomas Kattinig and adopted at the Committee's September plenary session, the EESC stresses that the future energy system will need to have both centralised and decentralised elements, but that its organisation cannot be left to chance.

During the debate, **Mr Ribbe** said: *"A clear vision is needed as to whether decentralisation or centralisation should be prioritised. After all, Europe's energy transition first and foremost requires investment certainty for both the public and private sectors, which can only be achieved if clear fundamental decisions are made."*

Echoing his words, **Mr Kattinig** added: *"Workers, trade unions and consumers must be involved in the energy transition, as promised by policy-makers and strongly called for by the EESC. However, here too, the Commission and the Member States leave more questions open than they answer. Furthermore, current energy policy initiatives will prevent, rather than encourage, broad public participation."*

Centralised and decentralised systems both have advantages and disadvantages. In a centralised system, value creation is typically concentrated on a small number of players. In a decentralised system, however, consumers can contribute as active customers, citizen energy communities, farmers, SMEs and municipal companies. (mp)

Future EU economic governance must mark a 'turning point', not a 'return to normal'

The European Commission's 2020 economic governance review is timely and should pave the way for a comprehensive reform, making a 'turn' to a revised and rebalanced framework instead of a 'return to normal'.

In an opinion drafted by **Judith Vorbach** and **Tommaso Di Fazio** and adopted at the September plenary, the EESC argues that a new economic policy is needed at EU level - one that focuses on prosperity to promote people's well-being and on a range of key policy objectives, such as sustainable and inclusive growth, full employment and decent work, fair distribution of material wealth, public health and quality of

life, environmental sustainability, financial market and price stability, well-balanced trade relations, a competitive social market economy and stable public finances.

Urging the Commission and the Member States to resume their reflection on the current EU rules in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, **Ms Vorbach** said: *"We urgently need to revise and modernise the economic governance framework. It should be more balanced and have prosperity at its heart, promoting the well-being of people in Europe. Nobody must be left behind. One way to do this is to apply the "golden rule" for public investment to safeguard productivity and the social and ecological base for the well-being of future generations. Further important points are ensuring sufficient public revenues, a fair taxation policy and mitigating the influence of economically questionable indicators on policy-making. Also essential will be closer involvement of the European Parliament, of the social partners and of civil society as a whole."*

Echoing her words, **Mr Di Fazio** added: *"The COVID-19 crisis is a massive shock, requiring full financial power. Harmony of purpose is needed to contain the economic and social consequences of this pandemic and to share the burden of the resulting damage equitably within and between Member States. Important short-term measures have already been established, such as the activation of the fiscal framework's general escape clause. However, instead of going for a 'return to normal' too quickly, we must take a leap forward and make a 'turn' towards a revised economic vision, one that steps up investment in training, research and development, and strategic productive activities."* (mp)



[EU territorial agenda - New policies must consider consequences of the coronavirus crisis](#)

The new revised EU urban and territorial agenda must address the effects of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and cohesion policy could be the right tool to deal with Europe's economic recovery. In two opinions adopted at the September plenary, the EESC takes stock of EU territorial policies and maps a way forwards.

In the first opinion, **Petr Zahradník** and **Roman Haken** focus on the revision of the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities and endorse the calls made in the new Territorial Agenda 2030 for a just and green Europe and for a more robust territorial dimension in all policies and at all levels of governance.

At local level, the keywords for the future must be the integration, sustainability and resilience of cities and regions. Speaking at the plenary session, **Petr Zahradník** said: *"The potential for implementing integrated projects in territorial and urban development is huge and so are the benefits associated with this approach in terms of synergising the effects, saving costs and making functional connections."*

Adding to this, **Roman Haken** stated: *"Considering the effects of climate change, the use of resources and the need to reduce environmental risks, the sustainability and resilience of cities and regions cannot be addressed separately. For this reason, the Urban Agenda should be coordinated as closely as possible with territorial cohesion policy."*

Cohesion is thus vital; it is also at the heart of an opinion drafted by **Gonçalo Lobo Xavier**, in which the EESC says that it could be the ideal tool to deal with the many challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and calls on the Commission to take action. "*We must act urgently and respond swiftly; the financial means to help and support Member States must be deployed in keeping with the relevant criteria, but also with courage*", said **Mr Lobo Xavier**. "*More than ever, Europe needs a differential approach to a single challenge.*" (mp)

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS



[High-level responses to Employers' Group letter on EU recovery budget](#)

By the EESC Employers' Group

The EESC Employers' Group received responses from the highest political level when calling for a swift agreement on an ambitious recovery budget. In June 2020, a letter on this topic was sent by the Employers' Group to the members of the European Council as well as to the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen and the President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli.

A key message of the Employers' Group was that successful, resilient businesses were key to the recovery of the whole EU economy. Therefore, there needs to be a firm focus on business conditions as we prepare for the post-crisis period. Frédéric Bernard, Mr Michel's head of cabinet,

stressed in his response on 3 July that the upcoming MFF would be key for a stable recovery and would also support a "*fully functioning and modernised Single Market*".

Likewise, Mr **Sassoli** noted in his response to the Employers' Group on 17 July that "*we need extraordinary, unprecedented economic measures and real, unconditional European unity*". He welcomed the shared understanding with the Employers' Group on the need for a united response from the EU level. To help European citizens and businesses recover from the crisis, an ambitious MFF is needed.

Ms von der Leyen also expressed her gratitude for the letter and the position paper ***Business is key to the EU's recovery from the corona crisis***. Both documents were forwarded to **Maroš Šefčovič**, Vice-President of the Commission for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight.

On behalf of **President Macron**, his chief of staff Patrick Strzoda confirmed the importance of relaunching the economy quickly. The letter was also transmitted to Bruno Le Maire, French Minister of Economy and Finance, and Clément Beaune, French Minister of State for European Affairs.



World Day for Decent Work

By the EESC Workers' Group

This year, celebrating the World Day for Decent Work on 7 October was more relevant than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing flaws in our societies, particularly when it comes to decent work, pay and income. Yet again, certain people - who were already among the most vulnerable - have been disproportionately impacted: young people in precarious jobs, women overrepresented in the most affected sectors or staying at home to homeschool and care for family members, self-employed and platform workers, low-paid workers, migrants, and those in undeclared work.

On the World Day for Decent Work, the Workers' Group joined the ITUC and the ETUC in calling for a New Social Contract for Recovery and Resilience to counter the effects of the COVID-19 crisis in a sustainable way by finally responding to the needs of the people. A genuine renewal of the European project requires sound social investment to complement economic policies, focusing on the preservation and creation of high-quality jobs, fair pay and an end to precarious work.

The Commission must urgently resume the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and in particular with initiatives on fair minimum wages, minimum income, pay transparency, and strengthening occupational health and safety regulations. In this regard, collective bargaining and the interests of precarious and vulnerable workers must be guaranteed. It is also crucial to ensure fairness in the platform sector, which generates huge profits for companies while workers in this sector are in an extremely precarious situation in terms of their labour rights, wages and working conditions.



What priorities for EU policies in the future?

By Simo Tiainen, member of the Diversity Europe Group representing the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK) of Finland.

A better economic, social and regional balance in Europe and the competitiveness of EU industries and businesses, including farming, must remain priorities of EU policies. Our competitiveness should be based on sustainable production, employment and economic growth.

Only an economically strong Europe can take on roles of leadership and responsibility. In trade negotiations, the principles of European food production, such as sustainability, high standards and food security, must never be compromised.

Farming is of key importance for the strategic, economic, environmental and social challenges of tomorrow. Europeans want to continue eating sustainable and safe food. This is why the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) must guarantee the supply of healthy, safe food, the protection of the environment and the countryside, animal welfare, climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, the livelihood of farmers and the viability of rural areas. The EU must defend the European agricultural model based on the principles of food sovereignty and sustainability. The CAP should be simplified and there should be less bureaucracy and more subsidiarity.

Lastly, EU policies should enhance sustainable forest management. The EU needs a strong forestry strategy that takes into account all dimensions of sustainability. It makes it possible to grow more timber and other products in Europe and can make a significant contribution to the development of a new kind of bioeconomy, to carbon neutrality and to jobs and growth. Sustainable forest management, the necessary carbon sinks and the need to preserve biodiversity are fully compatible with one another.

SOON IN THE EESC/CULTURAL EVENTS



[Tom Hegen's Habitat exhibition lands at the EESC](#)

Exploring the relationship between humankind and nature through aerial photography.

The EESC will host a **[photography exhibition entitled *Habitat*](#)**, featuring the work of **Tom Hegen**, an award-winning German photographer and designer from Munich.

Tom Hegen's work focuses on aerial photography projects, showcasing the impact of human activity on earth and frequently highlighting the relationship between humans and nature. The *Habitat* project invites viewers to discover our planet from a new perspective, to comprehend the scale of human activity on our planet and, ultimately, to take responsibility. The exhibition features a series of 31 images, focusing on

landscapes that have been transformed by human activity.

The exhibition will be displayed at the EESC from 26 October to 30 November 2020, in connection with the German Presidency of the Council of the EU. (ck)

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