



EESC Info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil society

July 2021 | EN

[Podcast - The Grassroots View- S2, E3: A new narrative for Europe](#)

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The COVID-19 crisis has shown the importance of solidarity between EU Members States, institutions and citizens. In the light of this experience, we discuss why the Conference on the future of Europe, which has just kicked off, is a new and important step in thinking together about our common European future.

EESC President **Christa Schweng** sets out the **new narrative for Europe** that the EESC will be arguing for in its role as observer on the CoFoE executive board and pledges to mobilise the Committee's extensive network across organised civil society to ensure the broadest possible participation.

Guy Verhofstadt, MEP, member of the CoFoE executive board and former Belgian prime minister, who in 2001 proposed the Laeken Declaration, which set in motion the European Convention, also stresses that Europe is at a crossroads - that it's time for Europe to chart its future path *together* with citizens.

Lorenzo Consoli, EU correspondent and an outstanding expert in European affairs, says that in his 30 years in Brussels, he has never seen the EU engage in such an ambitious pan-European democratic exercise. (dm)

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EDITORIAL



Editorial

A dash of optimism for the summer

Dear readers,

We start this summer with far more good news than last year. By the end of July almost 70% of adults in the EU should have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Travelling is becoming possible, albeit still complicated. And the launch of the NextGenerationEU fund is picking up speed.

July is traditionally the beginning of the new Presidency of the Council of the EU. This time the task goes to Slovenia and the EESC is looking forward to close cooperation throughout these six months. We will work on exploratory opinions requested by the Presidency, addressing topics such as adult learning, inclusive digitalisation and fair food chains. We also hope that the epidemiological situation will allow us to organise a number of in-person events in Slovenia to make the most of networking opportunities.

While we're on our marks for the upcoming summer break, we are still planning our activities for the autumn. One of our priorities is participating in the Conference on the Future of Europe. In September, we will start our "going local" activities in all EU Member States. Our members, in cooperation with national, regional and local civil society organisations, will organise a number of discussions. The aim is to listen to civil society at local level and to feed their input into a new narrative on Europe. We are eagerly anticipating these exchanges, as they will doubtless produce multiple original ideas.

Another priority for September will be monitoring the implementation of the NextGenerationEU fund – especially the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Our vast network of practitioners knowing the reality on the ground in all 27 Member States will play a key role here. We want to help make the launch of the fund even smoother by identifying bottlenecks and pointing out what works well

and what could be enhanced.

Before all this happens, I would like to wish you all, dear readers, an excellent summer break, full of quality time with family and friends. While respecting existing restrictions, recharge your batteries and enjoy all the little pleasures that we're slowly regaining after months of severe pandemic reality.

Christa Schweng

EESC President

DIARY DATES

13 July, Brussels

Climate and Sustainability Round Table with Youth

22-23 September 2021, Brussels

EESC plenary session

ONE QUESTION TO ...



"One question to..."

In our "One question to..." section, we ask EESC members to respond to a topical question that seems to us to be particularly relevant.

For the July edition, we asked **Cristian Pîrvulescu**, president of the ad hoc Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law, to comment on freedom of speech.

"Freedom of speech is a right that we must cherish and defend"

EESC info: More and more, it would seem that social media are fuelled by violence. This pattern of behaviour can lead to verbal or physical violence against all forms of authority, be it political, law enforcement, institutional or private. It certainly seems that anything goes on social media, and whether the idea you're defending is true or false simply doesn't matter. For instance, someone might feel that their personal grievance is legitimate and go so far as to slap France's head of state.

As president of the ad hoc Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law, given this state of affairs, where do you feel that the line should be drawn as regards fundamental rights and individual freedom, particularly freedom of speech?

Cristian Pîrvulescu: Freedom of speech is pivotal in any democratic society. It is a fundamental right without which democracy cannot operate. The interesting thing is that almost everyone demands this right, even those who are not necessarily interested in defending democracy and human rights for all.

However, the right to freedom of speech is often misunderstood. Many people think that it is an absolute right and use this argument to justify every kind of verbal attack. But verbal attacks can sometimes embolden people to move on to unacceptable physical violence. We have seen this recently with a number of tragic events which have made regulation of social media such a burning issue.

Legally, the state authorities are responsible for deciding how rights are implemented. They can limit freedom of speech, but only in very exceptional and strictly defined circumstances: the measures adopted must be necessary in a democratic society for national security, to prevent crime or to safeguard public health, for instance. Under the rule of law, it is up to the courts to settle disputes and decide where the line should be drawn. The executive, individuals and groups cannot take it upon themselves to deliver justice.

Political leaders have always been tempted to curb freedom of speech in order to prevent people making demands and voicing disagreement. However, the dawn of social media has sent good old-fashioned censorship out the window. We are therefore seeing a shift as the focus moves from freedom of speech to the other side of that coin: the right to information. These days, it is very difficult to distinguish between information based on genuine facts and disinformation spread for definite purposes.

One thing is certain: people defending a truth-based approach, such as investigative journalists and human rights advocates, are on the front line. If certain leaders or groups do not appreciate what these people are doing, it is now easier to tar and feather them online or paint them as enemies of the state or foreign agents in the press and on social media than it is to censor them. One obvious example here is the journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. Dozens of unfounded legal cases – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, with the apt acronym of SLAPP – were brought against her before she was murdered. They couldn't get her to shut up, so they decided to shut her down for good. The upswell of violence against journalists in Europe makes it even clearer that freedom of speech is a right that we must cherish and defend with all our strength in this new world.



Nurturing a shared culture of fundamental rights in Europe

by Cristian Pîrvulescu, EESC member and president of the ad hoc Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law

The time when fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy could be taken for granted on our continent is definitively over. It has become increasingly clear that these values need to be proactively defended against populism, hate speech, attacks against minorities, the shrinking space for civil

society and the tendency by some governments to concentrate power. The EESC's [ad hoc group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law](#) is dedicated to fostering a culture of fundamental rights in Europe.

In recent years our continent has been confronted with multiple crises which have challenged all the EU's values enshrined in [Article 2 of the Treaty](#). Since the new millennium the people of Europe have had to face a plethora of these challenges, the most striking of which were the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent draconian austerity measures, the rise of security threats and terrorism, the major humanitarian challenge represented by the desperate situations of asylum seekers, and the greatest health crisis in a century.

The EESC could not just stand by and do nothing. In 2018 it set up an **ad hoc group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law (FRRL)**, a 21-member body – over which I have the honour of presiding following my colleague, José Antonio Moreno Díaz – where civil society can share its views on developments in the area of fundamental rights, democracy and rule of law in the Member States.

The FRRL Group organises visits to all EU Member States, where it meets with social partners, civil society organisations (CSOs), law and media professionals, and the national authorities. Based on their input, it then draws up reports describing the situation in each country.

The overall approach is not to provide legalistic analysis but rather to facilitate a constructive dialogue on issues that are sometimes polarised. We have received very positive feedback from CSO representatives, who have found that the reports have indeed stimulated national exchanges.

Another key objective of the FRRL Group is to build on these country visits to highlight trends developing in Europe. This is why we organised our [first conference](#) in November 2019 - to present the overall picture emerging from the [synthesis report](#) of the first country visits. In November 2021 we will hold a second conference, this time bringing together stakeholders to debate the European Commission reports on the rule of law.

Our medium-term goal is to develop a wider civil society forum that will allow all relevant stakeholders to participate in inclusive and open debates on defending EU values. As an intermediary step, we will soon launch a new web section where stakeholders can share written contributions.

The FRRL Group wants to play its part in the development of a shared European culture of fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy. In addition to country visits and conferences, the FRRL Group has paid particular attention to the current COVID-19 crisis, organising hearings on the [impacts](#) and [recovery](#) – and has launched two own-initiative opinions to address the [impact](#) and the [rule of law aspect of the recovery funds](#).

Overall, the main added value of the FRRL Group is that it contributes the socio-economic view on fundamental rights and the rule of law, and creates a coalition of all kinds of civil society organisations.

including social partners. Our [opinion on the impact of the rule of law on economic growth](#) is symbolic of this approach and of the increasing interest of employers, workers along with the civil society forces represented in the EESC Diversity Europe Group, in these questions. The active participation of all groups is central to the work of the FRRL Group.

GUESS WHO IS OUR GUEST..



[Our surprise guest](#)

Every month we present a surprise guest whose work and commitment are an inspiration for others. For the July issue of EESC info we have invited **Dr Hans Henri Kluge, World Health Organization Regional Director for Europe, and Johan Strid, Director of The Ocean Race Summits, to share their thoughts**

with us.

Dr Hans Henri Kluge began his term as WHO Regional Director for Europe on 1 February 2020, following his nomination by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and appointment by the WHO Executive Board. He has 25 years' experience in medical practice and public health in numerous settings around the world.

Johan Strid started as Director of The Ocean Race Summit in August 2020. Before that, he served as secretary general first of the Swedish Scouts and Guides and then of the Swedish Paralympic Committee. Johan has a vast background in civil society activism, having been on the board of the Swedish Youth Council, the Swedish Red Cross and Ecpat. He has been an entrepreneur and started a number of companies. At European level Johan has served as chair of the Advisory Council to the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe and been a member of the European Scout Committee. (eh)



["The future is not written in stone and the course of the COVID-19 pandemic is in our hands"](#)

Interview with Dr Hans Henri Kluge, Regional Director for Europe of the World Health Organization

How do you see the impact of the vaccination campaign in Europe?

Since 4 February 2021, more people have been vaccinated against COVID-19 globally than have been confirmed infected since the beginning of the epidemic. Over 477 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in the European Region to date (as of 17 June).

This shows that great progress is being made: rates of hospitalisation and deaths have been decreasing, particularly in countries with high vaccination uptake among the older adult populations. This demonstrates not only that vaccination works, but that the strategy of vaccinating the most at risk first, as laid out by both global and regional advisory committees, and implemented across the WHO European Region, works – to save lives, ease the burden on health systems and bring us out of the acute stage of the pandemic as quickly as possible.

While vaccination is playing an important role in the declining rates of hospitalisation and deaths, we must remain cautious, because even if someone is vaccinated, he or she can still get infected and pass on the virus. We need to continue with proven public health and social measures, while also speeding up the pace of vaccination.

A very important message that I would like to convey is that the future is not written in stone, and that the course of the COVID-19 pandemic is in our hands, as it is determined by the actions of individuals and society as a whole.

And what is the situation globally?

One of the key messages is that more equity is needed. Vaccines are reducing severe disease and death in countries that are fortunate enough to have them in sufficient quantities to cover the most vulnerable, and early results suggest that vaccines might also drive down transmission. The shocking global disparity in access to vaccines remains one of the biggest risks to ending the pandemic

Currently, 77% of all vaccine doses globally have been administered in just 10 countries. We must do more to ensure that vaccines are spread equitably among countries and populations.

Another related message is that solidarity is key. This is the time to harness all solidarity and support to ensure that no one is left behind. Let's aim to get high vaccination coverage in each and every country, starting with those most at risk, so that we can take a big step closer to resuming our normal lives.

At the 74th World Health Assembly, the WHO's Director General called on countries to support a massive push to vaccinate at least 10% of the population of every country by September, and a drive to December to achieve our goal of vaccinating at least 30% by the end of the year. As a global public health community, we all need to step up our efforts

What are the lessons learnt and how could we be better prepared for the future?

The 74th WHA, which met from 24 May to 1 June, focused on ending COVID-19 and also on preparing for the next pandemic. More importantly, it was a huge collective endeavour to draw lessons from the current pandemic.

The WHO has commissioned several independent reviews and panels to guide the global health community to do better in our collective response to pandemic outbreaks or other public health emergencies of international concern.

All reviews have provided strong and clear recommendations on the future of a stronger WHO role in responding to health emergencies. We now need to move from recommendations to making it happen. This will be a major task, requiring broad political and financial commitment, and with a clear common goal of saving more lives, preventing loss of livelihoods, and generating equity in our pandemic response.

There have been proposals for a new pandemic treaty to strengthen the architecture for pandemic preparedness and response. This will be discussed at a special session of the WHA to be held in November.

In the European Region, I have set up the "Monti Commission" - a Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development to rethink policy priorities in the light of pandemics. Comprising former heads of state, scientists and economists, heads of health and social care institutions, and leaders of the business community and financial institutions from across the Region, this Commission will draw lessons from the ways in which different countries' health systems have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and will make recommendations on investments and reforms to improve the resilience of health and social care systems.

How is the EU supporting global and regional efforts in the fight against COVID-19?

The EU is one of the most important partners of the United Nations (UN) globally.

The EU accession process is a key driver of reform and a source of motivation for governments to make progress on a range of legislative and policy areas. EU investment packages will be a key driver for facilitating increased public and private investments in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnerships, including in the health sector, by European and international financial institutions. We also appreciate EU investments in health through funding for and joint actions with WHO/Europe in non-EU Member States.

During the current (post-)pandemic period, WHO/Europe is engaged in building alliances and shaping joint UN/EU strategies with the aim of furthering the process of EU accession in the Western Balkans sub-region, and strengthening the democratic and economic space in EU Neighbourhood countries.

WHO/Europe endeavours to use its prominence in health leadership to actively align, support, and accelerate strategic partnerships and collaborations in the European sub-regions as a cornerstone of our progress in health towards implementing the European Programme of Work, 2020-2025 and achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.



["We all have to do what we can to improve the health of the planet"](#)

by Johan Strid, director of The Oceans Race Summit

"Why would The Ocean Race, a sailing competition, want to help drive new and improved policies to tackle some of the most urgent issues facing our blue planet?" I get asked that question often and my answer is that we all have to do what we can to improve the health of the planet and, for us more specifically, our field of play: the ocean.

We have one ocean, but the way it is protected and governed is splintered. When you add to this the impact of climate change, it is a recipe for disaster for our marine world. Sailors in The Ocean Race have seen more of the ocean, and its decline, than most people on the planet. We urgently need to create a better system, with collaboration at the heart of it.

Inspired by the EESC's ground-breaking work ***Towards an EU Charter of the Fundamental Rights of Nature***, we will explore whether giving the ocean legal rights on its own can be a route to a better protected and managed ocean.

The Ocean Race is the world's toughest test of a team in sport. We can harness the determination of the round-the-world challenge to address the need for improved global ocean policies. We are not a government, an NGO, an academic institution or a business. We are a sports competition. This gives us an independent and far-reaching platform where we can bring together people from all sectors of society in a dialogue on solutions for the ocean. That is why we organise The Ocean Race Summits.

To date, we have organised 11 summits, the most recent of which was just on 16 June and focused on Europe, with the participation of EU Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen**, EESC Vice-President **Cillian Lohan** and **Virginijus Sinkevičius**, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries.

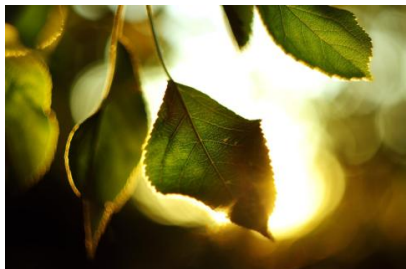
Before September 2023, we will hold another eight summits at key locations across all continents. These will bring together global players from government, science, industry, NGOs, media and sport, along with passionate ocean advocates, to drive solutions and commitments to tackling the issues facing our seas. We are using innovative working methods harnessing drive, competence and creativity from all participants in our Action Labs. This series of high-level events will produce a catalogue of proposals for improved global ocean policies, based on ocean rights.

In addition to the summits, The Ocean Race is driving an award-winning sustainability programme, based on the fact that we have a responsibility to embed sustainability into the heart of our operations and leave a positive legacy for future generations. Our learning programme teaches children and young people how to help the ocean. Scientific equipment on participating boats contributes with valuable data. At our stopovers, we are banning single-use plastics, sourcing sustainable food and creating a responsible greenhouse gas emissions strategy aiming for 100% renewable energy.

We want to show the world that it is not just possible to have a global sporting event that is sustainable, but that it is impossible not to be sustainable.

The EESC is a very valuable partner for us. You represent organised civil society in Europe and you have a voice at the table when the EU is making decisions. Your platform is much of what we want to achieve with The Ocean Race Summits, a meeting point for all forces that want to contribute to a healthier ocean representing all strands of global society. I hope that together we can build on what we have done together at The Ocean Race Summit Europe and cooperate to ensure that governments, companies, NGOs and institutions make commitments regarding the ocean. The global network of businesses, trade unions, organisations of the EESC and its members are a very important asset in working towards a healthy ocean. Your work on the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of Nature is an excellent baseline to work together from.

We are thankful for the cooperation with the EESC and look forward to continuing working together to achieve global legal recognition for nature and ocean rights.



[Herman van Rompuy: The old poet speaks gently](#)

We are delighted to host a new selection of haikus by Herman Van Rompuy, former President of the European Council, as part of our series "The old poet speaks gently."

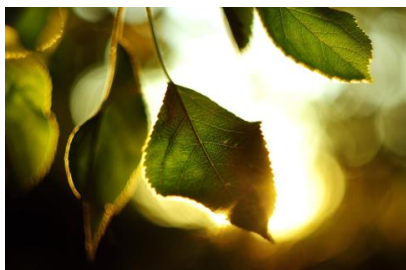
These haikus were originally written in French

Herman van Rompuy: The old poet speaks gently

Like every year the flowers
Are on their way to their appointment
More faithful than people

A vast forest
With spaces of shadow and light
Like life

Everywhere in the world
Poets sing of life and nature
This sharing makes peace



[Herman van Rompuy: Le vieux poète parle doucement](#)

Nous avons le plaisir de poursuivre la publication de la série de haïkus, sous le titre commun "Le vieux poète parle doucement", qui nous a été offerte par leur auteur Herman van Rompuy, ancien président du Conseil européen.

Comme chaque année les fleurs
Sont sur leur rendez-vous
Plus fidèles que les hommes

Une vaste forêt
Aux espace d'ombre de lumière
Comme la vie

Partout dans le monde

EESC NEWS



[The Slovenian presidency of the EU comes at a critical time for Europe](#)

On 1 July 2021 Slovenia took on the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, at a time when Europe is looking to recover, build back better and emerge stronger from the COVID-19

pandemic.

Slovenia's second presidency since its accession to the EU in 2004 will run under the slogan "Together. Resilient. Europe.", three words symbolising its main priorities. In the words of the Slovenian presidency itself: "Working together, supporting each other and acting in solidarity for the good of each and every European citizen will be key to strengthening the EU's resilience."

The Slovenian presidency's programme focuses on four priorities:

- enhancing the EU's **resilience** to various forms of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and continuing the work of the preceding German and Portuguese presidencies on strengthening the EU's cyber resilience;
- managing economic and social **recovery** after the pandemic while facilitating the transition to more technologically-advanced and environmentally-friendlier forms of economy;
- promoting the **Conference on the Future of Europe**, which will be the central topic of the **Bled Strategic Forum** in early September, expected to be attended by a huge range of participants from various European institutions.
- securing and strengthening the European way of life, including **respect for the rule of law**.

By pursuing these priorities, Slovenia will strive for a credible and secure European Union, capable of ensuring security and stability in its neighbourhood. Special attention will be devoted to the **Western Balkans** and credibly pursuing their EU enlargement process. In October 2021 Slovenia plans to host the informal **EU-Western Balkans Summit**. The **EESC's Western Balkans Civil Society Forum**, to be organised at the end of September, will contribute to the Summit with specific recommendations from organised civil society.

The EESC will ensure that the voice of organised civil society is heard through **five exploratory opinions**, requested by the Slovenian presidency, on topics ranging from adult learning to fair food supply chains. These exploratory opinions are:

- Adult learning;
- Key components of sustainable quality work during and after recovery;
- Exploiting the economic and social opportunities of digitalisation and improving the digital transformation of the economy, especially SMEs, focusing on human-centered artificial intelligence and data;
- Upgrading inclusive, secure and trustworthy digitalisation for all;
- Towards a Fair Food Supply Chain.

The EESC is looking forward to working with the Slovenian government on joint initiatives and events, and to supporting the Slovenian presidency through its extended network of European organised civil society. The Committee is delighted to see that it has already been invited to the **Conference on the Future of Europe Round Tables** planned in Slovenia, and to the Bled Strategic Forum.

More info about Slovenian presidency is available here:

<https://slovenian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/> (st)



Conference on the Future of Europe: EESC consultations will reach every corner of Europe

The president of the European Economic and Social Committee, **Christa Schweng**, kicked off the Committee's official activities relating to the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) with a live Q&A session. [**#CoFoE - Bringing the European project back to**](#)

[**citizens**](#) set out organised civil society's views and expectations regarding the Conference. It also highlighted the importance of engaging with people outside the Brussels bubble and brainstormed in preparation for the upcoming citizens' consultations.

EESC president **Christa Schweng** said that the Committee will conduct outreach initiatives in all Member States so as to guarantee fair representativeness: "We will involve employers, workers and the whole of organised civil society and convey their points of view to the Conference on the Future of Europe". She also referred to the recently adopted [EESC resolution](#) proposing a new narrative for Europe.

Commission vice-president **Dubravka Šuica** said that "Politics has changed in the European Union. For the first time ever, the Conference brings citizens into the heart of policy-making in the European Union. Through the Conference, citizens and civil society can together claim ownership of their future European Union".

MEP **Eva Maydell** stressed that "our job is to make the Conference on the Future of Europe meaningful for citizens"

The EESC's work on a new narrative for Europe was led by the presidents of the three groups that make up the Committee: **Stefano Mallia** (Employers), **Oliver Röpke** (Workers) and **Séamus Boland** (Diversity Europe).

Cillian Lohan, EESC vice-president responsible for communication, rounded off the discussion by saying that the EESC consultations on the Conference on the Future of Europe will reach every corner of Europe and be as wide-ranging as possible.

The Conference plans to have its conclusions ready by the spring of 2022 and the EU institutions will then reflect on what Europeans have been saying.

Watch the #CoFoE - Bringing the European project back to citizens kick-off event on the [EESC's Twitter account @EU_EESC](#) or on [Facebook](#). (ks)



"The European Green Deal will be just, or will just not be"

At the EESC June plenary Frans Timmermans announced measures to shield the most vulnerable from the possible extension of carbon pricing to heating and transport fuels, and heard the EESC's proposals to improve corporate decision-making on the green transition through social dialogue.

Welcoming the European Commission Executive Vice-President, **Frans Timmermans** EESC President **Christa Schweng** said: "The Green Deal is an ambitious growth strategy for the EU to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and provide economic impetus, but the social, labour, health and equity dimensions should be strengthened to ensure that no person, community, worker, sector or region is left behind."

Mr **Timmermans** said that the social dimension of the green transition was the Commission's prime concern, as the pandemic had blown social disparities out of proportion. He described the main elements of the Fit for 55 package to be released on 14 July.

The package would "hardwire social fairness into the new proposals", said Mr Timmermans, by:

- sharing the burden of climate action fairly between industries, governments and individuals, and
- introducing a social mechanism to help soften the impact on the most vulnerable of measures such as the possible extension of emissions trading to heating and transport fuels.

"We must protect vulnerable households against potential price increases for heating and transport fuels, especially in regions where clean options aren't readily available," said Mr **Timmermans**. " So if we were to

introduce emissions trading for these fuels, that means we must also take our commitment to social fairness a step further. Any proposal on emissions trading in these new sectors must come with a proposal for the social impact at the same time."

As part of the debate, Mr **Timmermans** heard the EESC's contribution to shaping a social deal integral to the Green Deal. The proposals, set out by rapporteur **Norbert Kluge** in an opinion entitled [**No Green deal without a social deal**](#) focused on stronger worker participation in corporate decision-making and on corporate social responsibility.

"We believe that by bringing in the workers' voice we can improve the quality of economic decisions that companies make in transitioning to a green model", said Mr **Kluge**.

"Worker information, consultation and board-level participation tend to favour a more long-term approach and improve the quality of decision-making in an economic reform agenda." said Mr Kluge.

However, the EESC stresses that a social deal as an essential part of a green deal is not just related to work. It is about income, social security and fiscal support for all who need it, including those without any access to work at all. (dm)



[Recovery and reconstruction after the pandemic must be the priority for the future of Europe](#)

The EU's top priorities for the near future must include putting the European economy back on track to deliver a sustainable transition and bring prosperity to Europe's people and businesses. This is the main thrust of the *Resolution on the EESC's contribution to the European Commission's 2022 Work Programme*, adopted at the EESC's June plenary session.

The two watchwords after the pandemic should be recovery and reconstruction, says the EESC in the resolution. Both investment and reforms must be rolled out to overcome the economic and social crisis and reinforce Europe's resilience to future shocks, which should be based on inclusive and sustainable growth, decent work and social justice.

The main pillars should be:

- unlocking the full potential of the Single Market;
- achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;
- creating a circular economy and achieving climate neutrality by 2050;
- ensuring good governance and democratic accountability.

Commenting on the adoption of the Resolution, **Christa Schweng**, EESC president, said *"I trust that the EESC's recommendations, which we have delivered well in advance, will provide valuable input into the forthcoming Commission work programme. The Committee remains fully committed to supporting the Commission's six headline ambitions and to fulfilling its role by facilitating dialogue within civil society and with the European institutions in order to turn these ambitions into reality"*.

Ms Schweng added that the participation of all citizens, through civil society organisations, would put the process of recovery and reshaping the future of Europe on a truly democratic basis: *"I count on the Commission to take on board the proposals of European organised civil society when setting next year's priorities."* (mp)



The new EU cancer strategy is a tremendous opportunity to safeguard the health of Europeans

With cancer set to become the leading cause of death in the EU, Europe's Beating Cancer Plan is certainly timely. The EESC welcomes this plan which is a milestone in the fight against cancer. However, unresolved forms of regional and social

inequality mean that there is still room for improvement.

The EESC strongly supports the Commission's new EUR 4 billion plan to fund action on cancer, the first strategy document since 1990 to focus on the fight against this scourge.

"The EU needs a new Marshall Plan for oncology and this is a step in the right direction. We must not waste this chance", stressed **Małgorzata Anna Bogusz**, rapporteur for the EESC's opinion on [Europe's beating cancer plan](#).

"The plan is fit for purpose as it covers many key aspects of the fight against cancer", said **Milena Angelova**, co-rapporteur for the opinion.

Cancer mortality and morbidity are correlated with the type of cancer, the patient's location and their social gradient. Attention must focus on regional infrastructure disparities and social imbalances in terms of employment and gender.

The EESC encourages the Member States to be proactive, and emphasises the need for effective prevention of occupational forms of cancer, calling for more research into exposure to carcinogens, mutagens and endocrine disruptors and the causes of occupational cancer, particularly in women.

Last but not least, the opinion emphasises the key role to be played by the social partners and civil society organisations when it comes to raising awareness and promoting healthy lifestyle campaigns. (at)



Civil society must be given an active role in the defence of EU values

The European Economic and Social Committee has pledged its ongoing commitment to working together with the European Commission and other EU institutions on upholding and implementing the EU's core values, notably the rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy.

In a debate on European values with European Commissioner for Justice **Didier Reynders**, held at its plenary session on 10 June, the EESC asked for stronger democratic involvement of civil society organisations and citizens at EU level, with the aim of expanding their participation beyond elections and enabling a meaningful civil dialogue. EESC members also placed particular emphasis on recognising social and economic rights as fundamental rights in the EU.

At the plenary, the EESC presented and adopted its opinions on the [European Democracy Action Plan](#) (EDAP) and the [New strategy for the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), in which it threw its support behind the Commission's recent initiatives aimed at protecting democratic values and citizens' rights in the EU.

The **EESC president Christa Schweng** said: "There are challenges to EU values everywhere; they cannot be taken for granted, even in countries with long-standing democratic traditions. Civil society expects a lot in terms of EU response, and wants to be actively involved in national and European discussions around the defence of these values."

Mr Reynders said: "Many of the problems will need a whole-of-society approach and international cooperation, in a coordinated effort by governments, civil society, researchers and fact-checkers, the private sector, media and citizens. I welcome the fruitful cooperation with your Committee in this regard."

In the opinion on the Charter strategy, the EESC called for measures to protect and support civil society organisations, which should include an alert mechanism for identifying and reporting harassment. It asked for social partners to be given more of a role in promoting and implementing the rights laid down by the Charter.

In its opinion on the EDAP, the EESC recommended that the Commission add a special pillar dedicated to the involvement of civil society and social partners and the promotion of labour democracy. It said it regretted that the EDAP had failed to address the important role of social dialogue and collective bargaining in reducing inequalities and encouraging Europeans to embrace democratic ideals. (II)



"Only by increasing its impact will the ECI be able to reconnect the EU with its citizens"

The 10th ECI Day, dedicated to the European Citizens' Initiative, took place exceptionally online and over two days. EESC president Christa Schweng, European Commission Vice-President

Věra Jourová and European Parliament Vice-President Pedro Silva Pereira assessed the state of this unique instrument of participatory democracy.

In her introductory remarks, **Ms Schweng** stressed that one key feature of every participatory process is its impact: "A lack of impact can create disenchantment, disengagement and frustration among citizens." She added: "It is only by increasing its impact that the ECI will become a strong tool that is able to reconnect the EU with its citizens."

So far, only six initiatives have managed to reach the required signature thresholds since 2012 and their impact has been quite limited and late in coming. However, there are reasons for optimism because 2021 saw the first two pieces of legislation inspired by ECIs take effect: the **Drinking Water Directive**, which was influenced by the **Right2Water initiative**, and the so-called **Transparency Regulation**, which is a follow-up to the **Ban glyphosate initiative**.

In her video message, **Ms Jourová** drew attention to the changes and improvements introduced by the new ECI Regulation, which entered into force in January 2020. She then explained that the real impact of ECI initiatives goes beyond legislative follow-up: "Even initiatives that do not reach the final formal steps of the process can have multiple impacts," she said. "From the moment citizens start an ECI, they bring the issue they care about into the public space. And this generates awareness and produces effects."

Mr Silva Pereira said that the European Parliament was still leading the debate on how to raise awareness of the ECI and how to improve the way it works: "It is important to ensure that if an initiative manages to reach the final stage, it is taken seriously into consideration and addressed properly." (na)



Circular public procurement should be mandatory for governments in EU countries

With an annual expenditure accounting for around 14% (or EUR 2 trillion) of the EU's overall GDP, governments are Europe's biggest consumers. Their expenditure stems mainly from public tenders to purchase the works, services and supplies they need from companies.

Considerable work has been done in the EU over the past few years to encourage public authorities to embrace more sustainable consumption patterns, looking beyond short-term needs to the longer-term impacts of each purchase.

The European Commission has since 2017 issued guidance in the form of Green Public Procurement criteria, phasing in circular economy elements to close energy and material loops in supply chains, while minimising negative environmental impacts and waste creation.

However, these measures have had a limited impact because compliance is voluntary. The EESC believes it is time to introduce **mandatory minimum Green Public Procurement criteria** and to give the circular economy a strong boost through procurement directives and sector-specific legislation.

Circular public procurement will allow administrations to move beyond the lowest price criterion at the time of purchase.

"Procurement is often controversial because the selection criteria for projects are all too often very one-sided, with no consideration for lifecycle impact or what a project achieves", says **Mr Wyckmans**. "The idea that the lowest price should be the only allocation criterion should be abandoned in favour of 'value for money', which encompasses innovation, quality of products and services, sustainability, greening and social impact."

The European Commission has already developed a number of [life-cycle costing](#) (LCC) templates which are freely available for procurers to check against products and services. These tools allow public authorities to consider the lifecycle costs of the product, work or service, from purchase through operation and maintenance to end-of-life. These should now be upgraded, says the EESC, to include the cost of carbon.

The EESC also believe it is vital to ensure that **SMEs** have a chance to bid for circular public contracts and get the help they need. They offer enormous potential but are in danger of being sidelined owing to the complexity of the procedure. Only if the necessary support is provided can they contribute to local and human-oriented tenders. (dm)



[Pay transparency: binding measures are necessary but not sufficient to reduce the gender pay gap](#)

The EESC welcomes the Commission's initiative on binding pay transparency, but considers that the proposed directive should be strengthened in several areas and further measures taken to address the root causes of the gender pay gap.

In its [opinion adopted on 9 June](#), the EESC welcomes the Commission's proposal for a directive on binding pay transparency measures, which will help workers to enforce their right to equal pay in cases where they have been victims of pay discrimination.

However, the EESC considers that the proposed directive needs to be strengthened in a number of areas, including the criteria used to determine the value of work, the scope of some transparency measures and the role of social partners and collective bargaining.

The "equal pay for equal work" principle applies to "categories of workers" which, under the Commission proposal, are specified by the employer. The EESC believes that it is crucial for there to be mechanisms to ensure that categories of workers are determined in a gender-neutral way, involving trade unions and workers' representatives, in accordance with national law and practice.

Further measures aimed at addressing the structural issues at the root of the gender pay gap should also include guaranteeing adequate and accessible childcare, awareness-raising initiatives, ensuring better representation of women in decision-making positions, and eliminating tax-related disincentives to women's employment. The full web story is available [here](#). (na)



Strengthening the international role of the euro is key to enhancing Europe's global position

The EU needs to set ambitious economic objectives to strengthen the euro. This has become even more important given the pace of change in the global economy and the EU's current position in terms of innovation, competitiveness and fostering an

investment-friendly regulatory environment.

In [an opinion adopted at its June 2021 plenary session](#), the EESC welcomed the European Commission's Communication on [The European economic and financial system: fostering openness, strength and resilience](#). As the post-pandemic transformation is causing a significant shift in the global balance of economic power, the EU should act swiftly to increase Europe's economic resilience. In particular, the EESC agrees with the need to strengthen the international role of the euro as a key tool for enhancing Europe's global position.

Tomasz Wróblewski was rapporteur for the EESC opinion. He thinks that the Commission should focus more on the reasons for the euro's weakening international role. "The global position of the euro is diminishing, but not as rapidly as that of the dollar," he said. "This does not change the fact that the position of the euro is affected by different things. Firstly, the lack of an integrated, common market for financial services. Without the completion of the **Banking Union** and of the **Capital Markets Union** it will be hard for us to compete with the dollar."

The EESC also recommends paying more attention to the rapidly growing economy of **China** and calls for an action plan that takes this into account. The role of the Chinese renminbi is growing in international trade and clearing. China is also working intensively on its digital currency, leaving most of the world behind. The EU must respond quickly and the EESC supports the proposal to create a digital euro. "In this domain," points out Mr Wróblewski, "Europe may have more attractive solutions, given our commitment to the protection of personal data and user privacy." (na)



[National Recovery and Resilience Plans: the EESC calls for real involvement of organised civil society in their implementation](#)

The involvement of organised civil society is far from satisfactory in most EU countries, warned the EESC at the annual conference of its European Semester Group, held remotely on 31 May.

The conference on [Building a resilient Europe – Civil society and the National Recovery and Resilience Plans](#) saw contributions from key speakers from EU institutions, National Economic and Social Councils, think tanks and EU civil society organisations. It focused on three topics: the involvement of organised civil society in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs), the just transition towards a green, digital and sustainable European economy and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Committee president **Christa Schweng** opened the debate by stressing the challenge of transforming this crisis into a set of new possibilities. One particular challenge is to successfully unlock the potential of the Recovery and Resiliency Facility: "Most Member States did not engage in sufficient consultation with organised civil society, or did so too late", noted Ms Schweng. "The situation now is a series of National Recovery and Resilience Plans that vary substantially in quality and methodology and we really wonder whether the plans are actually meeting the needs on the ground".

Tiziano Treu, president of the Italian National Economic and Social Council (CNEL), said that the role of the Conference on the Future of Europe was to outline a new form of European governance, which needs to be simplified and made more effective, and must include proper rules to ensure the involvement of organised civil society.

European Semester Group vice-president **Luca Jahier** said: "A stronger 'Citizens' Pillar', encompassing organised civil society and regional and local authorities, in an alliance with national parliaments, will be crucial to ensure that reform processes and investments are properly monitored and bring about the necessary involvement of legitimate stakeholders". (na)



Towards more sustainable food systems – the transition must be inclusive and fair

To contribute to the [2021 United Nations \(UN\) Food Systems Summit](#), the EESC held an [online hearing](#) on 28 May to explore the vulnerabilities and inequalities of European food systems and to identify how to achieve more equitable and fairer supply chains. High-level speakers from the UN, the European

Commission and the European Parliament shared their views on the changes needed to strengthen equity, fairness and a rights-based approach in the transition to more sustainable food systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call for change. Although farmers and food system workers have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis and have provided an uninterrupted supply of food for all Europeans, "this crisis has underlined the fact that getting food 'from farm to fork' is not something that can be taken for granted," said **Andreas Thurner**, president of the EESC Thematic Study Group on Sustainable Food Systems.

The EESC has developed several proposals and specific ideas over the years, which can be summarised in five sets of recommendations to feed into the UN Food Systems Summit:

- I. Foster comprehensive and integrated food policies;
- II. Promote healthier and more sustainable diets;
- III. Ensure fair prices and ban unfair trading practices;
- IV. Enhance the potential of short food supply chains and agroecology;
- V. Ensure structured involvement and participation of civil society. (mr)



Greening of transport must provide realistic alternatives

The EESC supports the greening of transport, but stresses that the energy transition must be fair and provide viable and realistic alternatives that take account of the specific economic and social features and needs of all parts of Europe, including

rural areas.

This is the main message of an opinion drawn up by **Pierre Jean Coulon** and **Lidija Pavić-Rogošić** and adopted at the Committee's June plenary session. In its assessment of the 2011 White Paper on Transport, which aims to break the transport system's dependence on oil without sacrificing its efficiency and compromising mobility, the EESC takes a firm stand.

Limiting modes of transport is not an option: the aim should be co-modality, not modal shift. In addition, the ecological transition must both be socially fair and preserve the competitiveness of European transport, with full implementation of the European Transport Area as part of the Single Market. Delays in this respect are regrettable.

"Curbing mobility is not an alternative. We support any measures aimed at making transport more energy efficient and reducing emissions", said **Mr Coulon**. "Europe is going through a period of headwinds, but this should not lead to changes of course in terms of social and environmental expectations of the various European initiatives."

The EESC also encourages an open, continuous and transparent exchange of views on the implementation of the White Paper. "The Committee draws attention to the importance of securing the support of civil society and stakeholders, including through participatory dialogue", added **Ms Pavić-Rogošić**. "A good understanding and broad acceptance of strategic goals will be extremely helpful in achieving results." (mp)



EESC debates the updated European industrial strategy

On 17 June, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and its Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI) held a spirited debate examining the views of organised civil society following publication of the European Commission's update to the new industrial strategy. The debate, which is the first in a series of joint activities by EESC sections on the topic, questioned whether the updated strategy contains sufficient elements to enhance EU industry's resilience and strategic autonomy.

On 5 May 2021, the Commission updated the [EU Industrial Strategy](#) to ensure that its industrial ambition takes full account of the new circumstances following the COVID-19 crisis and helps drive the transformation to a more sustainable, digital, resilient and globally competitive economy.

The CCMI president, **Pietro Francesco De Lotto**, who chaired the debate, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated many processes that were already ongoing. The speed with which society and industry have had to adopt digitalisation processes in these past 16 months is unprecedented and the changes we have experienced are ground-breaking, first with supply chains, then with medical equipment and after that, with the vaccines. "

The president of the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT), **Alain Coheur**, who co-chaired the debate, described the context for the second panel's work, said: "The crisis has brought other issues to the table that were not mentioned in the first Communication on the industrial strategy in March 2020. We must see this crisis as an opportunity to give the European area industrial autonomy".

Antony Whelan, digital adviser to European Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen, presenting the Commission tools to measure EU dependency, said: "In our bottom-up exercise we identified a very limited number of areas where the EU as a whole is in a situation of worried dependency."

The EESC will hold a series of debates on the industrial strategy: seven webinars, starting with the current one on 17 June. A high-level closing debate is planned for March 2022. (ks)



Transatlantic partners determined to walk the walk

The EESC's Transatlantic Relations Follow-up Committee met just days ahead of the high-level EU-US summit to discuss a wide range of subjects of importance to civil society, first and foremost climate change and trade.

"Encouraging signals on all fronts are coming from both sides of the Atlantic", said **Christian Moos**, president of the EESC's Transatlantic Relations Follow-up Committee.

David Livingston, senior advisor to Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry, confirmed that the current administration was now fully committed to meeting and going beyond the Paris agreement objectives. "It will not be acceptable", he said, "for major key player countries to let 2021 go by without substantial updates to their National Determined Contributions, which are at the heart of the Paris Agreement".

"The active participation of civil society in the US together with the EU and other countries allowed the US to maintain an engagement, despite the absence of commitment from the previous administration", noted **Elina Bardram**, from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA).

The Atlantic Council's **Emilie Bel** stressed that Europeans were ready to build a positive trade agenda, but on an evenly balanced basis.

Marjorie Chorlins from the US Chamber of Commerce, affirmed that, despite transatlantic political turbulence and the COVID-19-induced recession, the US and Europe remained each other's most important markets. The recently published [Transatlantic Economy 2021](#) report demonstrated that the two partners represented a substantial portion of global consumption and global GDP.

Tanja Buzek, president of the EESC's International Trade Follow-up Committee, stressed the importance of civil society involvement for a transparent trade policy and the need for strong coalitions to reform the WTO. (at)



The EESC's activities during the Slovenian Presidency



New publication: EESC activities during the Slovenian presidency (July-December 2021)

In the second half of 2021, Slovenia will hold the EU Council presidency for the second time. And it is the second time that it comes at a critical moment for Europe.

In 2008, the EU was facing the financial crisis, and today it is still struggling with the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore not surprising that EU preparedness for and resilience to crises, especially in the area of health, are some of the main priorities of the Slovenian presidency, along with other strategic issues such as cybersecurity. It is also during the Slovenian presidency that many of the tasks related to the Conference on the Future of Europe will have to be carried out.

The EESC is happy to work closely with the Slovenian presidency, especially as our priorities converge: recovery, fair climate and digital transitions and upholding the rule of law are also at the heart of the EESC's work.

This brochure is available in EN, FR, DE and SL on the [EESC's website](https://www.eesc.europa.eu). Printed copies may be ordered from: vipcese@eesc.europa.eu. (af)

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS



Webinar
Challenges of the Digital & new EU Economy
14/06/2021 | 10:00-12:30 | EESC

Employers' Group webinar on digitalisation calls for a Digital Rural Act

By the EESC Employers' Group

Following the recent adoption of the EESC opinions on the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the Digital Services Act (DSA) at the June Plenary, the Employers' Group hosted a webinar on the "Challenges of the digital and the new EU economy" on 14 June.

Digitalisation transforms societies and economies. Digital services increasingly weave into Europe's economy and are shaping Europe's digital future, a trend that has been further accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis. The European Commission has been particularly active in launching different initiatives to foster Europe's digital sovereignty, through ensuring a safe, fair, open and accountable online environment for its citizens and unlocking the potential of its Digital Single Market.

However, progress on digitalisation remains uneven across the EU. Many rural and remoter communities are actively seeking new opportunities in digital services to drive economic growth, but face difficulties due to inadequate infrastructure and skills.

The webinar, held under the auspices of the Portuguese Delegation of the EESC Employers' Group, in the framework of the Portuguese presidency, which made this issue one of its top priorities, aimed to contribute to the debate on how to make DMA and DSA "fit for purpose" and thus feed into the legislative process.

Speakers and participants recognised the need to bridge the urban-rural digital divide with the deployment of fibre and 5G in cities, as well as in rural areas, and called for a Digital Rural Act.

With regard to digital infrastructure, EU employers called for skills. The digital transition can only become reality if all Europeans have basic digital literacy and if there is a sufficient skilled digital workforce. The employers stressed that the EU and Member States must take full advantage of the RRF national plans and all existing financing instruments (DEP, InvestEU, Structural and Cohesion Funds) to build a true DIGITAL Union.

Speakers also reiterated that only by avoiding additional fragmentation of the digital Single Market will Europe's companies be able to scale up in the European Union. Harmonised legislation will help European companies not to have to deal with 27 different legal systems and have legal certainty, predictability and a level playing field in a market where competition conditions are fair for everyone, particularly SMEs, which occupy the vast majority of digital platforms.

Along with a fully-fledged Digital Single Market, EU employers firmly supported the key objective of restoring Europe's Digital Sovereignty while remaining open to free trade and supporting the multilateral system. In that regard, they welcomed the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) as part of Europe's answer to create a level playing field for all online services, in line with European values and standards.

However, they stressed that if the EU wants to become a geopolitical actor with real digital clout, it must leverage both its regulatory power and reinforced industrial and technological capabilities to advance the European model of digitalisation and shape the global environment.

To know more about the event and the recommendations, please click [here](#) (dv)



[Helping to close the gender pay gap before 2104](#)

By the EESC Workers' Group

On average, [women earn 14% less than men in Europe](#). In some countries the situation is slowly improving; in others it is deteriorating. The gap is expected to close on average by the twenty-second century in the European Union, but in countries

such as France this is [expected to take another 1000 years](#).

The reasons for the gap vary: sectoral segregation (women being overrepresented in low-paying sectors); work-life balance (women spending more time in unpaid work at home); the glass ceiling (less than 10% of CEOs are women); and plain discrimination, despite the law.

To help tackle the gender pay gap and end pay discrimination, the European Commission has issued a [Pay Transparency proposal](#) with enforcement mechanisms to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. The proposal includes the fundamental concept of **binding pay transparency** rules, also improving access to justice.

While pay transparency is by no means the only tool for combating pay discrimination, being able to identify gender-biased structures is clearly key to tackling the salary differences.

The EESC has suggested improvements to the original Commission proposal in an [opinion](#) which calls for the directive to be strengthened by guaranteeing that all workers can benefit from this advantage, not just those working in large companies. The success of these measures depends on genuine engagement from the social partners.

Securing fairer pay and ending pay discrimination are key goals in protecting the fundamental rights of all workers in Europe.



[Media freedom cannot be taken for granted but must be actively preserved](#)

By Elena-Alexandra CALISTRU, member of the EESC Diversity Europe Group

Few places in the world enjoy Europe's solid tradition of upholding the values of free, independent media. However, the advent of digital platforms, illiberal tendencies to shut down access to information, the growing threat to investigative journalists and the crisis generated by COVID-19 are all placing different but simultaneous pressures on the ecosystem that allows that exceptionally free media to exist and fulfil its democratic role.

The EESC recently adopted an [opinion](#) on the Commission's Communication on [Europe's media in the Digital Decade: an action plan to support recovery and transformation](#). We particularly welcomed the acknowledgement that these underlying trends and the COVID-19 crisis could, without a strong policy and financial support response, undermine the resilience of Europe's media sector and its democratic role.

The instruments proposed in the Communication encompass a wide range of measures focused on the recovery and transformation of the media industry and on increasing its resilience. For this to happen, steps must be taken to tackle the structural challenges facing the industry and to foster an enabling environment in which the media and civil society are able to participate in an open debate, free from malign interference and disinformation.

However, there are some important points to consider if we want the EU to remain the best possible place for media freedom.

Firstly, measures should be linked to the social realities underlying the discrepancies in the media and audiovisual industry landscape in the different Member States, and to the differing size and needs of local and national media. Financial support must therefore be transparent, accessible and inclusive, especially when it comes to local media and media start-ups. Secondly, civil society must become a partner in this, in order to empower individuals, strengthen media freedom and counter disinformation through media literacy.

If Europe's Media Action Plan is to succeed, all stakeholders need to engage in the effort to recognise the media's importance for our democratic values.

SOON IN THE EESC/CULTURAL EVENTS



ESMA Museum and Memorial Site in Argentina: a symbol of human rights

The Workers' Group has presented the campaign to inscribe the ESMA Museum and Memorial Site in Argentina on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The ESMA Museum and Memorial Site in Argentina was a clandestine centre of detention, torture and extermination during the Argentine dictatorship of 1976-1983. A symbol of Argentinian history, it is at the same time an institution of international relevance as it provides yet more evidence of human rights abuses and crimes against humanity which must never be forgotten.

The campaign to make ESMA a UNESCO heritage site is supported by human rights organisations, the trade unions of the Mercosur and the Argentinian Embassy to the European Union.

The event was held online on 30 June and web-streamed on the EESC's web page and social media channels. You can find out more [here](#). (ck)



A decade of climate change in Ciril Jazbec's pictures

To mark the beginning of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the EESC presents an online exhibition by the awarded Slovenian photographer [Ciril Jazbec](#), a Leica O.B. winner and recipient of the World Press Photo award for 2021.

The virtual photo exhibition "A decade of climate change" features a series of 25 images which are part of the artist's long term project "Climate Change Resilience".

The official opening is to take place on 8 July with a Live Art Talk web-streamed on Facebook and hosted by the EESC vice-president for communication **Cillian Lohan** in the presence of the Deputy Permanent

Representative of Slovenia to the EU, ambassador **Tamara Weingerl Požar**, of EESC Slovenian member **Neža Repanšek** and of the artist himself.

The online exhibition will run from 5 to 30 July 2021. Do not miss the chance to visit it [here](#). (ck)

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