Editorial

I am proud to begin the new year by bringing to all of you across Europe our new, fully digital EESC Info in 23 languages! You will be able to read it on your smart phone, tablet, laptop or office computer. Now that’s what we call modern media! In contrast to the “one-language-fits-all” trend prevailing on the web, however, you will also be able to read it in the language of your choice.

It has taken some time to achieve this and stay true to the EESC’s commitment to multilingualism in a bid to stay in touch with the diverse grassroots organisations that the Committee serves and represents. I am grateful to the translation management and IT departments, whose sustained commitment and support have made it possible to bring you a product which, in addition to being in line with the new media landscape, is also accessible to local readers in their own language.

A chapter is now closing – one that began twenty-six years ago. Back in 1991, the "ESC Newsletter", as it was initially called, was a brief account of proceedings-cum-agenda printed in A4 format, with little text and hardly any visuals. In May 1994, a black-and-white, newspaper-like version appeared with more room for comment, more visuals and a new name – "ESC Info". With the transition to full colour printing in 1996, EESC Info gradually took on the shape and features current readers are familiar with. Now exit the physical newsletter, and a new chapter begins – one that will be read on screens, though print media aficionados will have a print-out option.

I am very pleased that this digital chapter is beginning during my term of office. I hope this legacy will help the EESC improve its reach and be fitter for the future. Indeed, I find it extremely significant that EESC Info should be going digital just as the Committee is preparing to turn sixty in a few months’ time. I see this as a sign of its determination to keep abreast of change and be relevant, which bodes well for the future. I hope the voice of civil society will echo loud and clear in these pages for years to come.

In wishing you all the best for the new year, I also wish the EESC Info team all success in writing this new chapter in EESC Info’s history!

Gonçalo Lobo Xavier
EESC Vice-President for Communication

Diary Dates

02/02/2018
Brussels
How do Social Economy Enterprises contribute to the integration of migrants?
In short

The future belongs to the economy of values

The 2nd Open Eyes Economy Summit in Krakow on 14 and 15 November urged all stakeholders to debate and review economic practices and mind-sets in order to tackle current and future challenges and to guarantee sustainability.

An EESC delegation participated in the Summit that received the honorary patronage of the EESC’s Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier. The Summit was co-organised by the Polish employers’ organisation whose president, EESC member Andrzej Malinowski (Employers, PL), participated in the opening session. EESC members joined debates to discuss the incorporation of social values into the economy, the creation of valuable relations and better use of potential.

The EESC believes that all stakeholders must contribute to effective solutions, economic actors must improve their cooperation and legislators must plan ahead for change. The Summit showed that profit remains an objective for the new economy, but that it is closely interlinked with social and economic values. (jk)

Civil society asks to be on the front line in shaping Europe’s future

In response to rising inequality, creating trust and confidence and ensuring a fair transition for all should be a key priority of any future strategy for Europe. Civil society believes it must be involved in shaping, governing and implementing such a new long-term strategy. This was the key message of a major event of the EESC Steering Committee, a conference entitled Transition to post-2020 Europe organised in Budapest on 27-28 November.

Opening the conference, the president of the EESC’s Europe 2020 steering committee Etele Baráth underlined that the Europe 2020 strategy’s goal is still relevant. The aim now must be to improve governance and further strengthen the objective of a “smart, inclusive and sustainable” Europe. Sustainability should be at the very heart of the new strategy, emphasised Luca Jahier, President of the EESC’s Various Interests Group.

The event, which was organised with the support of the Hungarian Economic Association and Ministry for Human Capacities, gathered members of the EESC and national Economic and Social Councils, EU institutions and representatives of Hungarian government and civil society. (sj/dm)

EESC member Catelijne Muller champions the human-in-command approach to AI at Lisbon Web Summit

What if algorithms were soon deciding whether someone could have a loan, a mortgage, a health insurance policy, a job – or even a heart transplant? Wouldn’t you want to make sure that the data upon which its decisions are based are safe, complete, bias-free and hack-proof?

While the hugely differing forecasts about future job losses show that we are still in the dark as to what AI has in store for workers, shouldn’t we all sit around the table while there is still time and think about how best to ensure that it makes work more enjoyable for workers as well as profitable for businesses?
Is giving legal personality to robots a route we should take? Should robots be liable for any fault they might commit, or should their maker/programmer be liable instead?

These are the questions that **Catelijne Muller**, EESC rapporteur on Artificial Intelligence, raised at the 2017 Lisbon Web Summit on 5-8 November.

In her keynote speech, Ms Muller zoomed in on the political, social and legal challenges of AI, making the case for a human-in-command approach. (dm)

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**Investment in agriculture and food training can help shape the future of development in Mediterranean**

On 16 November, the Bureau of the EESC’s section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT) carried out a field trip to the CIHEAM Mediterranean Agronomic Institute in Zaragoza (IAMZ) and to local agricultural cooperatives in Aragon, Spain.

Members heard how IAMZ has played a key role for fifty years in nurturing the next generation of leaders in the Mediterranean Agro-food sector.

EESC members discussed with IAMZ the importance of investing in human capital through education, training and capacity building to improve the productivity of the agro-food sector in the Mediterranean and foster employment for young people and women in rural settings.

Between 20 and 30% of the active population in southern Mediterranean countries are employed in agriculture. The trip was combined with a visit to an olive oil mill and a vineyard in the region to learn more about successful cooperative models in the local agro-food sector. It also included a visit to the Moncayo Natural Park to see how the natural forest environment is managed. (aj)

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"**Unity**: Estonia’s Digital Dome at the EESC"

A blue installation with a dome-shaped top called "Unity" was set up on the ground floor of the EESC’s headquarters during the month of December 2017. Visitors entering this enclosed space had the chance to explore and enjoy scenes and landscapes from several EU countries - Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia - projected onto the dome by more than a dozen video cameras producing a single, 360° image. The installation, which showcased Estonia’s digital development and forward-looking outlook, was part of the events organised by the EESC in the framework of the Estonian Presidency. (ck)

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**New publications**

**EESC outlines its contribution to the Bulgarian presidency**

The EESC has published a brochure detailing its priorities during the Bulgarian presidency of the EU. The brochure can be downloaded at: [here](#).
European Civil Society rewards genuine entrepreneurship and quality employment champions

The German project Discovering hands, which trains blind and visually impaired women to use their superior tactile sense to improve early breast cancer detection, was awarded EUR 14,000. The four other initiatives from Greece, Belgium, Italy and Spain were awarded EUR 9,000 each. Revive Greece helps refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to integrate into host countries by teaching them computer programming and connecting them with young European entrepreneurs. DUO for a JOB from Belgium is an intergenerational and intercultural mentoring programme that offers a free six-month individual service for young migrant job seekers, provided by people over 50 years of age who have professional experience in a similar field to theirs. The Italian Progetto Quid run by Cooperativa Sociale Quid is an ethical fashion brand that helps vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as asylum seekers and victims of slavery, prostitution and domestic violence to enter the labour market. The Spanish Laundry ID project by the Institute of Robotics for Dependency (IRD) aims to create jobs for people with disabilities in a laundry service that has been technologically redesigned and adapted to their needs.

"It is a great pleasure and a privilege to present this prize to the winners. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate them, and also to pay well-deserved tribute to all the individuals and civil society organisations whose hard work and commitment to making people's lives better is an example to everyone," said EESC President Georges Dassis.

The five winning initiatives show what is being done by numerous NGOs across Europe to help some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society enter the labour market.


Politics and society have a shared responsibility for combating youth radicalisation

Despite a number of high-quality initiatives, not enough is being done to prevent young people from succumbing to the lure of violent extremism, the EESC says.

In the fight against youth radicalisation, Member States and the EU need to involve civil society organisations more effectively as partners who can make a key contribution to social and values-based resilience against extremist ideas, the EESC said at its December plenary.

Instead of focusing on short-term, punitive security policies driven by "crisis" events, EU policies should invest more in prompt but also long-term and coordinated prevention efforts, the EESC stated in its opinion on Cooperation with civil society to prevent the radicalisation of young people.

Rapporteur Christian Moos (Various Interests, DE) stressed that young people are especially vulnerable to extremist propaganda, as they do not have a strong sense of identity and often feel excluded by society.

Prevention requires a multi-agency approach involving policy-makers, police and prisons, social workers, schools, the media, businesses and civil society organisations, according to the EESC.

Mr Moos praised the European Commission's work in this area. Its Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), gathers frontline and grassroots practitioners and promotes the exchange of best practice and on-the-ground experience, while its High Level Expert Group on Radicalisation is to advise on the further development of EU policies and more structured cooperation between stakeholders and between Member States.

Nevertheless, the EESC says these initiatives are not enough.

The EESC places special emphasis on formal and non-formal education for active participation in a diverse society and for teaching critical thinking and media literacy.

Fighting xenophobic and populist tendencies through more intercultural awareness and also through a firm understanding of EU values is likewise seen as helpful.

Youth organisations were singled out as providing valuable alternative opportunities for developing a healthy sense of personal identity. The EESC also stressed the role of trade unions and religious communities, as well as that of support services and networks that can help schools and families detect the first signs of radicalisation.

Combating youth unemployment and poverty should also be high on the agenda, recommended the EESC. (II)

The EU needs a comprehensive food policy

The current EU framework does not suffice for a transition to more sustainable food systems. A comprehensive food policy is urgently needed in order to improve coherence across food-related policy areas, restore the value of food and ensure the effective implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
In its own-initiative opinion the EESC calls for a comprehensive European food policy, with the aim of providing healthy diets from sustainable food systems and linking agriculture to nutrition and ecosystem services.

“We need to bring more fairness into the market and we need to make people understand the value of food” said rapporteur Peter Schmidt (Workers, DE).

A comprehensive modern food policy must be complementary to, but not replace, a reshaped CAP. It should also meet multiple criteria, such as food quality, health, environment, sound economics and good governance. “Europe needs to set the standards”, stressed Mr Schmidt.

The EESC recommends major steps at EU level, such as:

- A sustainable food labelling system;
- Closer links between producers and consumers;
- Ensuring fair prices for producers;
- Developing an Action Plan on Food Sustainability;
- A Directorate General for Food, responsible for food-related policies and the source of regulation, legislation and enforcement. (sma)

EU-wide cooperation on defence is key to Europeans' security

The EESC encourages increased cooperation between the EU Member States on defence and supports the launch of the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) and the European Defence Fund (EDF) as important drivers of not only Europe’s economy, but also its integration.

“Europe needs to re-evaluate and adapt its capabilities for its own defence industry and develop a widespread European culture of defence and security to give full meaning to European citizenship”, said EDIDP rapporteur Antonello Pezzini (Employers, IT).

“The defence sector is an important, high-tech economic sector. We need to encourage research and development in the defence industry as it will also have a positive impact on other key industries”, added EDF rapporteur Mihai Ivașcu (Various Interests, RO).

European manufacturers – including SMEs – and users, involving at least three Member States, need to be effectively integrated when it comes to funding projects and procuring goods and services.

Every euro invested in the defence industry generates a return of 1.6 euros. Therefore Member States and the European Commission should use the EDF to keep key industrial capabilities on European soil and ensure that European money is spent on European R&D and on buying European weapons systems.

“Europe needs to build up strong key capabilities that support European interests and apply high social and environmental standards. It needs to take greater responsibility for its defence and must be ready and able to deter any external threat to its citizens and way of life”, concluded the rapporteurs. (sma)

EESC welcomes new work-life balance package

Measures proposed by the European Commission to tackle the unequal distribution of care responsibilities in families and reverse the resulting lower presence of women in the labour market represent a step in the right direction, but they require further study and improvements, the EESC said in its opinion on the Work-life balance of working parents and caregivers.

The Commission’s proposal for a Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers, which was the subject of the opinion, contains the first legislative measure of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It includes a paternity leave of at least ten working days around the birth of the child, a non-transferable parental leave of four months and carers’ leave of five days a year for workers looking after ill or dependent relatives.

All these forms of leave are to be compensated for at the level of sick pay. The age of the child up to which parents can take leave or request flexible working arrangements is to be increased from eight to twelve.

The EESC said the proposals should also take account of the needs of businesses and especially of small and medium-sized enterprises. (Il)

Member States should regulate new forms of employment

Digitisation has resulted in significant changes in the labour market, and workers engaged in new forms of employment are often excluded from social security. In an opinion adopted at the December plenary, the EESC urges Member States to regulate new forms of work and ensure that these “new workers” can access pensions, healthcare and unemployment systems.

“It is now high time for the European Commission to develop the appropriate framework to be used by its Member States,” said rapporteur Petru Sorin Dandea (Workers, RO). “With regard to social security contributions, an intervention at EU level is absolutely necessary. We need legislation to make sure that people who are not yet recognised as workers are covered by social security
The EESC calls on the EU and its Member States to:

- regulate these new forms of employment and grant “worker” status to any person engaged in a “new form of work”.
- make the payment of pension, healthcare and unemployment contributions compulsory for any registered professional income.
- link up their electronic social security and tax databases, so that people who have a professional income, but whose “worker” status has not been recognised, can be identified.
- explore new ways of funding social security systems. For instance, part of the digital dividend could be used to guarantee access to social security for people engaged in new forms of work. (mp)

**Live-in carers face precarious conditions despite shortage of care workers**

The EESC goes local to gain a first-hand insight into Europe’s live-in care work sector

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held the first of its “going-local” meetings on the future of live-in care work in Europe in London on 29 November, in a bid to conduct research into the precarious labour conditions of these workers.

Aside from the UK, the EESC will also hold meetings in Germany, Sweden, Italy and Poland - some of the countries of origin and destination of live-in carers.

The visits are a follow-up to the EESC’s own-initiative opinion adopted in 2016, which was the first policy document at EU level to deal with live-in care work in Europe.

The exact number of live-in carers is unknown, as is their contribution to the economies of EU Member States.

According to the International Labour Organisation, domestic work accounted for 5-9% of all employment in industrialised countries in 2012. In an ageing Europe plagued by labour shortages in the care sector and a lack of adequate infrastructure for long-term care provision, the number of live-in care workers is expected to grow.

Live-in carers are among the most mobile parts of the workforce in the EU, with Eastern Europe still supplying many such workers.

However, their employment status is often unregulated, their work undeclared and often carried out in very difficult conditions.

The EESC is, among other things, proposing that the existence of live-in care workers in the EU labour market be recognised by providing a common definition of their profession as well as their inclusion into the long-term care system, with all the rights arising from relevant EU and Member State employment regulations.

Furthermore, Member States should provide financial and organisational support for care recipients, who often are not aware that by hiring a live-in care worker they become real employers, with their fair share of responsibility.

Referring to the UK, rapporteur Adam Rogalewski (Workers, PL) said: “We have noticed that the social care sector has been severely impacted by funding cuts of £6 billion since 2010. These impacts have severely degraded the availability and quality of care. Labour shortages as a result of low pay and poor conditions in the sector have led to a surge in informal care arrangements. Civil society across Europe and especially in the UK has been calling for a reversal of the logic of austerity. There is an urgent need for greater investment into the care sector.”

The findings of the EESC country visits will be presented in a report to be published later in 2018.

**The Sustainable Development Goals must guide the EU’s future trade agenda**

The European Economic and Social Committee adopted its opinion on The core role of trade and investment in meeting and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its December plenary session (rapporteur: Jonathan Peel (Employers, UK); co-rapporteur: Christophe Quarez (Workers, FR)).

“We believe that the SDGs, together with the Paris Agreement, will fundamentally change the global trade agenda. The need to implement these profound agreements must lie at the heart of all future EU trade negotiations”, commented Jonathan Peel.

The EESC believes that there are a number of key policy areas where the EU needs to work to align upcoming trade agreements with the SDGs, especially when it comes to trade agreements with developing countries. The Committee urges the EU to promote the implementation of the SDGs in its bilateral relations as well.

“A stronger focus on the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability is needed in EU trade agreements in order to make sure that they contribute to SDGs”, said Christophe Quarez. The inclusion of Trade and Sustainable Development chapters with civil society monitoring mechanisms in EU trade and economic partnership agreements is of paramount importance. These mechanisms have huge potential to promote EU values, including social and environmental standards, and can also deliver tangible results. (sg)
Civil society calls for stronger socio-economic rights in the Mediterranean

More than 100 civil society representatives from Union for the Mediterranean member countries met on 13-14 December in Madrid to discuss the challenges facing the region. The 2017 Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions focused on economic, social and cultural rights, social protection and a new generation of women's rights in the Mediterranean region.

The participants unanimously adopted a final declaration which condemns all forms of violence and terrorism and the infringement of fundamental rights in the Mediterranean region. It also urges the EU institutions to design an efficient and flexible mechanism to ensure the safe and legal arrival of refugees, whose human rights are being violated on a daily basis.

The participants stressed the key importance of economic, labour and social rights for economic development and democratic governance in the region. They also stressed the need for affordable and good quality education to advance socio-economic development in the Mediterranean.

Organised civil society urged all Mediterranean countries to enshrine women’s rights and gender equality in their constitutions and to develop the necessary institutions to protect women from all gender-based violence and discrimination.

Civil society urges the Euromed labour ministers to put the topic of basic levels of social protection on the agenda of their next Ministerial Conference on Employment. (sg)

Bulgarian Presidency of the EU: a challenge and an opportunity

Bulgaria is taking over the EU Presidency for the first time at a tough moment for Europe. This task will be an important test of its political, administrative and diplomatic capacity. Bulgaria is taking a very responsible approach to its first presidency and is aware that its decisions will be critical for Europe’s future. It will seek to strike the right balance and encourage broad consensus on priority issues. Bulgaria is taking a realistic and pragmatic approach to its presidency. Its aim is to develop an action plan with each country that sets out tangible steps but does not create unrealistic expectations.

Bulgarians know that they are known mainly as one of the EU’s newer Member States, with the worst economic and social indicators, but this presidency is going to reveal some little known facts about our country and focus Europe’s attention on Bulgaria’s unique cultural heritage. As the oldest state on the continent, Bulgaria has kept its present-day name and place in the Balkan peninsula for over 1 300 years. Following its accession to the EU in 2007, the Bulgarian alphabet became the third European alphabet – after the Latin and Greek alphabets. The country has never sought fame, but this seems to be turning to its advantage nowadays. Bulgaria knows what it takes to preserve its national identity and spirit and is trying to develop a strong sense of national pride. Aware of its own value but still slightly shy: it is easy to fall in love with this hidden gem.

The Bulgarian Presidency will have three keywords: consensus, competitiveness and cohesion:

- consensus on key topics such as security, migration, the Western Balkans - providing a clear European perspective for this region - and Black Sea cooperation;
- competitiveness regarding economic and monetary union and strengthening the social dimension, looking towards the Union's policy after 2020;
- cohesion because Europe’s future is inseparably linked to its cohesion policy, which provides added value to EU citizens and is a tried and tested instrument for reducing disparities and guaranteeing the success of the European model.

United We Stand Strong will be the Bulgarian presidency’s motto.

Bulgarians are confident that our presidency will be a success. Our ambition is to fulfil the priorities laid out in the Commission’s Agenda for a more united, stronger and more democratic union. We make a clear commitment to being neutral, balanced and firm where necessary in the name of unity and solidarity.

EU Platform for Change launched at EESC

EESC President Georges Dassis and European Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc officially launched the EU Platform for Change at a major conference held at the EESC in Brussels on 27 November. The Platform aims to increase female employment and equal opportunities in the transport sector.

"Trying to improve equality between men and women in the transport sector is not only a question of gender equality: it is an economic and social imperative which touches on employment, innovation, sustainability and growth in the EU," said Mr Dassis.

According to Ms Bulc, "Only 22% of transport workers are women. There is huge potential for the sector to improve equal opportunities and I am excited that companies and organisations agree on this and are committing themselves to increasing female employment. By involving women and men together to promote gender equality we will ensure that our societies flourish at all levels."

The Platform has been developed by the EESC in cooperation with the European Commission and will enable stakeholders from all transport sectors to highlight their specific initiatives promoting gender equality and to exchange good practices. (mp)
On 27-28 November 2017, the EESC hosted the 11th European Platform for Roma Inclusion, organised by the European Commission and focusing on the transition of young Roma from education to employment.

This was the first time that the EESC has hosted the Platform since it was set up in 2009 to help boost cooperation between stakeholders on Roma inclusion.

The Platform addressed the extreme marginalisation of Roma in Europe, who face segregation in schools and are largely excluded from labour markets. Participants included ministers from Member States, the EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, vice-presidents and members of the European Parliament and the EESC, other senior EU officials and civil society organisations representing Roma.

EESC Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier said: “Hosting the platform here in the house of civil society signals the importance of civil society organisations as an agent for positive change for Roma inclusion.”

The EESC has set up a permanent study group with a mandate to monitor and report on how civil society sees the implementation of Roma integration strategies and facilitate further dialogue on Roma issues between civil society groups and the EU.

The group also organises country visits and hearings with stakeholders to raise awareness about Roma discrimination and exclusion.

This year’s Platform aimed to seek solutions to the fact that Roma are the most under-represented group in the labour market. According to the European Agency for Fundamental Rights, as many as 63% of Roma aged between 15 and 24 do not work or attend school or training courses.

The recommendations put forward in the workshops hosted by the EESC were presented at the high-level political debate on the second day of the event. (II)

Thirty-three schools from across Europe will come to Brussels next March and tell European institutions just what role they see culture playing in Europe's future. They will brainstorm, debate and vote on three proposals which European institutions will factor into their policy making.

The schools were selected to participate in this initiative by means of an electronic name picker in Brussels on 6 December. One school from each of the 28 EU Member States and five candidate countries (Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey) will be involved.

Called "Your Europe, Your Say!" (YEYS), the event is organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the voice of civil society at European level, and is the Committee's flagship event for young people.

Students from secondary schools will leave their familiar classrooms and come to Brussels on 15 and 16 March to share their views and ideas and work together on "United in diversity: a younger future for European culture". Through this initiative, the EESC is seeking to ensure that the views, experiences and ideas of the younger generation are taken on board in EU policy making.

Further details about YEYS2018 are available on the event's official page and in last year's video here. (ks)

The EU in a globalised communication world was the theme of the EESC’s 11th Civil Society Media Seminar, which took place in
Madrid on 24-25 November.

Globalisation permeates all areas, as does communication. In fact, globalisation is driven by communication and communication technologies. The internationalisation of media, a global media market dominated by only a few huge TNC (technology, computing, and telecommunications) networking centres, the use of algorithms and social media have turned the world upside down.

At the seminar, these transformations and trends were explored by three panels:

I. - Populism – How should civil society meet the challenge of populism?
II. - Fake news – the new anti-media weapon?
III. - Code of culture – the driver's licence for social media use?

Lively discussions with experts from academia, media and civil society proved both that the theme is topical and that organised civil society has a stake in it. Citizens' engagement is important in fighting populism, fake news, hate speech or xenophobic developments, but also in defending European culture and values, shaped by human rights, gender equality, freedom of speech, and fair distribution of wealth.

The EESC will shortly publish a report on the seminar, containing the main messages from the panellists and audience. (sma)

**EESC's 2018 priorities place European citizens at the centre of Europe's future**

On 13-14 November 2017, the EESC Bureau – the Committee's political leadership body – met in Sophia, Bulgaria, where it established the EESC's political priorities for 2018. These priorities will constitute the basis for the own-initiative opinions that will be adopted by the EESC in 2018, in addition to the ones drawn up in response to specific requests from the EU law-makers.

The priorities, which aim to make European citizens the main players in the future of Europe, include:

- guaranteeing the effective implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and underlining the need for the creation of decent jobs;
- ensuring a fair transition to a digital economy and society;
- enhancing sustainable growth for the benefit of all citizens by encouraging entrepreneurship and investment, fair fiscal policies and better wealth distribution;
- promoting a fair transition to a low-carbon, competitive economy and sustainable energy and mobility;
- promoting an inclusive migration policy that facilitates integration and an ambitious external migration policy;
- enhancing social and territorial cohesion by providing an adequate EU budget;
- deepening EU economic, fiscal and financial governance and completing the Economic and Monetary Union for a sustainable and homogeneous Europe.

PHOTO CAPTION: EESC president Georges Dassis with the President of the Economic and Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria Lalko Dulevski

Finally the new priorities reiterate the importance of applying the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights to all the Union’s domestic and foreign policies in order to strike a fair balance between economic freedoms and fundamental rights and to better promote our democratic values. (pt)

**News from the Groups**

**EESC Various Interests Group discusses ideas for a "European Manifesto of Professionals"**

The EESC's Various Interests Group officially presented the plan for a "European Manifesto of Professionals" at a conference entitled "The liberal professions, a lever for the development of Europe: towards a European Manifesto of Professionals" organised at the Campidoglio in Rome on 1 December 2017, in cooperation with the Comitato Unitario Permanente degli Ordini e Collegi Professionali (joint standing committee of professional associations and bodies).

The aim of the event was to discuss ideas and come up with a common definition of liberal professions at European level, and and to provide a starting point for future action in this area. With 47 million people in Europe (around 22% of the working population) working in regulated professions, it cannot be denied that the professions play a key role in our economies and societies. All the proposals developed will be gathered together and feed into a "European Manifesto of Professionals", aimed at ensuring that the EU's professions can achieve their full potential in the near future.

High-level speakers included the President of the EESC Various Interests Group Luca Jahier, the Italian Minister of Labour and Social Policies Giuliano Poletti, and the President of the Italian National Council of Economics and Labour (CNEL) Tiziano Treu.
"The liberal professions were already mentioned in the Treaty of Rome, signed 60 years ago, in Article 193 establishing the European Economic and Social Committee. Our journey therefore began many years ago", said the president of the EESC Various Interests Group, Mr Jahier. "Today, we want to renew this commitment and make a tangible contribution for the liberal professions so that they can develop their full potential in the European Union over the next few years."

The key ideas in the "Manifesto" were presented by Arno Metzler, Vice-President of the Various Interests Group, who then introduced the debate, which was structured around three panels (cl).

### Employers discussing trade with Commissioner Malmström

The Employers believe that the business community has a crucial role to play in spreading a positive message about trade and in explaining what an ambitious trade policy can do and achieve. It is business that can tell the story of the practical benefits stemming from trade agreements. This was the main message the members of the Employers' Group delivered to Cecilia Malmström, EU Commissioner for Trade, during the meeting on 6 December 2017.

The Commissioner presented the current state of play in ongoing EU trade negotiations. Ms Malmström underlined that the Commission is continuing its efforts to make trade negotiations as transparent as possible. Also, when trade agreement comes to force, there is a need to give it proper attention. "We would like employers to get even more involved in explaining benefits of trade", she said.

European trade policy should be open and inclusive but cannot be naïve and unconditional, stressed Jacek Krawczyk, President of the Employers' Group. He admitted that the ratification of CETA will be a long and challenging process. The more effective the implementation of the provisional application is, the more the benefits of CETA can be demonstrated to sceptics and the greater the chances are for full ratification.

During the discussion, EESC Members raised a number of questions relating to various aspects of EU trade policy. The Members reassured the Commissioner that the employers support the Commission in pursuing an ambitious European trade agenda based on openness and reciprocity. (lj)

### European Pillar of Social Rights - What next?

The Workers' Group has been working consistently to deliver on the goals of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Recently adopted EESC opinions drawn up by members of the Workers’ Group offer practical proposals to push forward the process of building a social Europe within the framework of the Pillar.

Erika Koller's *Work-life balance of working parents and caregivers* looks into how to increase women's labour market participation and encourage men to take on more family responsibilities. Work-life balance is the first route towards implementing the Social Pillar and would make a real contribution to working parents' lives and achieving more gender equality in Europe.

Plamen Dimitrov's *Wealth inequality in Europe* includes practical proposals on fiscal policy and wealth taxation as the most powerful tools to ensure capital reinvestment, wealth redistribution, quality jobs and minimum standards for workers so as to fight Europe's deepening inequalities.

Finally, Petru Sorin Dandea's *Sustainable social security and social protection systems in the digital era* addresses new forms of work brought about by digitisation that are not protected by legislation on salaries, working conditions and social security. It calls for new rules to identify them, protect the workers and ensure sustainable social security systems.

With these opinions, the Workers’ Group is promoting important elements of a progressive Europe and will fight to make sure that legal instruments guarantee their implementation. (mg)
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