



EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil Society

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Editorial

The future of democracy in Europe



Dear readers,

For years Europe's territory was laid waste by war. Every European city has some blood-stained historical vestige of conflict or civil unrest. We are now living through the longest period without war on the territory of the European Union. In the very places that were once torn apart we now have interregional and international bodies working to facilitate the smooth operation of the architecture that we call the EU. This is highly symbolic, of course, but symbolism is not enough.

During the first few decades after the European Economic Community was set up we saw that countries wanted to be members of this club, and the progress of this united Europe was based primarily on its economic potential. Common policies introduced to improve economic and social cohesion, in particular the currency union, were an important milestone, but the drive to achieve cultural and political convergence is not yet complete. For a significant proportion of Europe's citizens the vision of European integration has been obscured by heavy clouds.

Recognising the urgency of the situation, European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker last year presented the European institutions with a White Paper on the future of Europe. The EESC carried out a public consultation across Europe on the White Paper, and communicated the proposals from civil society to Mr Juncker. Whatever people's personal views and analysis with respect to the five scenarios that emerge from the Juncker White Paper, the fact is that conditions are too difficult to permit very bold approaches. But the White Paper's proposals on future challenges in the EU do not feature the word "democracy". And the mechanism that could resolve the dilemmas is precisely the putting of democracy into practice.

Democracy requires participation, not inertia. Those citizens who have learned to take part in the processes that concern them campaign and press their case, not just as members of an interest group, but in meaningful way to serve the public interest. If political union is achieved through public dialogue and joint agreement, and above all through every Member State respecting democratic institutions, then there is every reason for us to hope that we will build a Europe capable of withstanding current and future pressures.

There is no question that democracy holds the "key" to very many issues of our time. All we need to do is to use it. But to use democracy at European level, we have to have learned how to implement it in our own countries. On 1 and 2 March a major conference on the future of democracy in Europe will be held close to the Acropolis, the very site where the concept was born. I am really looking forward to meeting distinguished speakers to consider the factors that undermine democracy, and the threats to democracy in Europe. We will discuss the relationship between democracy and European law, highlight the reasons why social inequality results in a fracturing of social cohesion, and talk about the national sovereignty of the Member States in the context of European integration.

To paraphrase the poet Odysseus Elytis when he accepted the Nobel Prize: if democracy offers certainty in mean times, it is precisely because it is our destiny and in spite of everything our destiny lies in our hands.

Georges Dassis,
President of the EESC

Diary Dates

20/02/2018 - 21/02/2018

Brussels

Delivering on the Circular Economy - What's Next? Circular economy stakeholder conference

01/03/2018 - 02/03/2018

Athens

EESC conference on The future of democracy in Europe

06/03/2018 - 07/03/2018

Brussels

4th Migration Forum

14/03/2018 - 15/03/2018

Brussels

EESC's plenary session

15/03/2018 - 16/03/2018

Brussels

Your Europe, Your Say!

In short

[What place is there for culture in Europe's future? European teenagers prepare to tell Brussels](#)



Over a five-week period, members of the European Economic and Social Committee will visit the selected schools in their countries to prepare the students for "[Your Europe, Your Say](#)" (YEYS), the youth assembly which will take place in Brussels on 15-16 March 2018.

EESC members will work with the students in advance of the March meeting to prepare answers to some key questions concerning **the future of European culture** :

- What is European culture: is it just the sum of national traditions or are there common values that make us all Europeans?
- What is the role of culture and cultural exchanges in students' lives?
- What can the European Union do to promote culture (cinema, music, dance, literature, theatre, etc.) and better protect cultural heritage sites?
- What role could culture play in the economic rebirth of Europe's regions and cities?
- How can this rebirth give new opportunities to young people in terms of new jobs?

Known as "Your Europe, Your Say!" (YEYS), this 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. Through this initiative, the EESC ensures that the views, experiences and ideas of the younger generation are taken on board in EU policy making.(ks)

[EESC President Georges Dassis meets ESEC President Patrick Bernasconi](#)

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), **Georges Dassis**, and the President of the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (ESEC), **Patrick Bernasconi**, met in Brussels on 17 January to present an initial assessment of the enhanced cooperation between the institutions they head and to explore possibilities for further joint activities.

The EESC and its French counterpart plan to build on their joint efforts to boost the voice of civil society on key social issues directly affecting European citizens.

Since signing their partnership agreement in June 2017, the two presidents have carried out a number of joint activities that have



highlighted their closely aligned positions on two highly topical European issues.

On the question of the **posting of workers**, they have stressed the need to avoid at all costs a race to the bottom on workers' conditions in Europe.

As regards climate change, they have highlighted the need for **climate justice**, encouraging the EU and national governments to adopt measures that protect the most vulnerable and poorest sections of society, which are often the most badly affected by climate change, despite being the least responsible for it. (dm)

[President Dassis takes part in European Parliament's Silver Rose Awards ceremony](#)



The President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), **George Dassis**, took part on 23 January in the 15th [Silver Rose Awards](#) ceremony, held at the European Parliament by SOLIDAR in cooperation with the Socialists and Democrats Group in the EP and the Party of European Socialists.

Mr Dassis, whose presidency has been characterised by a drive towards a more solidarity-based Europe, expressed both his personal support and the EESC's backing for SOLIDAR's work to build a fairer Europe: *"Solidarity was a key value in the foundation of the European Union and must continue to be part and parcel of the European project."*

SOLIDAR is a European network of over 60 civil society organisations from 27 different countries, working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. It has been holding the Silver Rose Awards since 2000, in order to highlight the work of civil society organisations and individuals in creating projects and initiatives to build a fairer and more solidarity-oriented world.

[The EU's human rights civil society organisations report more difficulties in their work](#)



On Friday 19 January the **EESC**, in partnership with its Liaison Group, hosted the launch of a report prepared by the **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)**, which warns of a shrinking space for civil society action to fight for the respect of human rights in the EU.

The report "[Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU](#)", highlights some troubling difficulties increasingly encountered by EU civil society organisations in carrying out their work. It divides them roughly into several areas:

- Legal restrictions that can range from difficulties in setting up an organisation to those relating to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, expression and information.
- Obstacles blocking access to resources, especially structural and long-term financing;
- Stigmatisation and attempts to discredit them, as well as physical and verbal attacks against activists, instead of a protected environment in which to carry out their activities;
- Difficulties in positively influencing legislation and policy-making as recognised legitimate players.

The report concludes that, in order to provide strong support for the protection, promotion and full exercise of human rights, there is an urgent need to put all the suggestions given by the FRA and other EU bodies, such as the EESC, into practice, and to strengthen the effectiveness of CSOs within the EU. (mr)

EESC News

[EESC consults civil society on cybersecurity](#)



The EESC urges the EU and its Member States to adopt a European-level cybersecurity model, to strengthen the mandate of the European cybersecurity agency and, lastly, to establish an effective European certification scheme for online services and products.

These are the key conclusions of the public hearing on the Cybersecurity Act held in Brussels on 9 January 2018 which will feed into the [EESC opinion](#) being drafted by **Alberto Mazzola** and **Antonio Longo** of the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN).

The EESC broadly supports the cybersecurity package set out in the European Commission proposal submitted to the Council in September 2017 and flags up the following measures.

- **A European cybersecurity model**

The concept of cybersecurity has emerged worldwide. It is a global challenge as attacks may take place anywhere and target individuals, civil society organisations, social systems and economic sectors across any Member State. This is why the EESC is

encouraging the EU to take the necessary steps and agree on a model of resilience against such attacks at European level.

- **A stronger EU cybersecurity agency**

The European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA) is a centre of expertise for cybersecurity in Europe and is currently based in Greece. The EESC believes it should be developed, made permanent and endowed with more resources. It should focus on e-government and universal services (e-health) as well as preventing and combating ID theft and online fraud.

- **A European cybersecurity certification**

In order to guarantee a high level of security, the EESC recommends establishing an EU cybersecurity certification framework, based on commonly defined cybersecurity and ICT standards at European level. Online services and products could then be certified with a proper labelling system, with a view to improving consumer confidence. (mp)

The EESC calls on the Commission to specify the proposed reporting criteria on cross-border tax arrangements



The Commission must set out more precise hallmarks for the proposed reporting obligations on cross-border tax arrangements and transactions, in order to prevent subjective interpretation by taxpayers and tax authorities, which could lead to over-reporting and administrative burdens, the EESC urges in its [opinion on disincentives to tax avoidance or evasion](#).

The Commission's [new directive](#) puts forward an obligation for intermediaries – entities, companies or professionals that give advice to taxpayers on tax planning – and in some cases taxpayers themselves, to report tax schemes that fall within four standard types of reportable activities to their authorities. The information will be automatically exchanged between national tax authorities.

"The scope of the proposed hallmarks is too broad", said rapporteur **Victor Alistar** (Various Interests, RO). He added that "when revising the criteria, the Commission must strike a balance between legal certainty and flexibility, to ensure the effectiveness of the deterrent and the feasibility of the obligation."

The EESC also asks the Commission to elaborate on how the directive applies to the digital economy and to ensure the proportionality of the directive through keeping administrative costs low for all businesses.

The Committee endorses the proposed logistical and technical support for the implementation of the respective tools in the Member States, as well as the aim of increasing the transparency of intermediaries' activities by means of the proposed measures .

"The reporting obligation will deter intermediaries from offering aggressive tax planning schemes. The mechanism will create tax justice and contribute to fair competition and stable tax revenues for Member States", said co-rapporteur **Petru Sorin Dandea** (Workers, RO). (jk)

EESC hosts launch of Commission toolkit advising Member States on EU funding for migrant integration



In January, the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** and the **European Commission** jointly organised the launch of the Commission's new toolkit to help Member States strengthen the integration of people with migrant backgrounds by making more efficient and coordinated use of available EU funding instruments.

The [toolkit](#) contains practical recommendations for national and regional funding authorities on how to choose from and best combine the various EU funds accessible under the current 2014-2020 budget period.

The aim is to foster the inclusion of over 20 million third-country nationals who are living in the EU legally, but continue to face a plethora of challenges and discrimination.

As was highlighted at the launch event, as many as 40% of them are at risk of poverty, while 18% are unemployed and 19% leave school early, which is almost double the EU average.

"The EU has to show humanism and solidarity. Migrants aren't to be seen as a burden. If they are properly integrated, they will be a great boon, not only to our economies but to our society as a whole," said **EESC President Georges Dassis**. (ll)

On the photo: Corina Crețu, European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Cristian Pîrvulescu, EESC member, and Georges Dassis, EESC President

The countries of the Western Balkans need a clear roadmap for accession to the EU

This was the main message from the public hearing on the economic and social cohesion and European integration of the Western Balkans, held by the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels.

"We are very pleased that the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU has chosen the Western Balkans to be one of their priorities and has asked the EESC to draft an opinion on the subject", said **Ionut Sibian**, president of the EESC's study group on the [Economic and social cohesion and European integration of the Western Balkans](#) **Andrej Zorko**, rapporteur for the EESC's opinion,



pointed out that the region was extremely complex and that there was a need for greater regional cooperation and more serious involvement of civil society in the European integration process. "***The Western Balkans must be one of the EU's priorities over the coming years to ensure political stability in the region***", insisted **Dimitris Dimitriadis**, co-rapporteur.

Representatives of civil society organisations, think tanks, EU institutions and academia agreed that the economic convergence of the Western Balkans would be a long-term process and outlined high levels of unemployment, low productivity, the skills gap and weak competitiveness as some of the problems the countries of the region were facing.

"**Cronyism remains rife**", said **Peter Sanfey**, Deputy Director of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The participants agreed that there were already various instruments and programmes in the region which were tackling some of these problems, but **that offering a clear European perspective to the countries would serve as a**

catalyst to accelerate the reforms. They also emphasised **the crucial importance of involving the social partners and civil society organisations from the region in the European integration process** in a more formal way. (sg)

"Made in Europe" must be on equal footing with competitors on European market



While protectionism is not an option for Europe, neither can the EU allow its internal market to be flooded by products that fly in the face of its social and environmental standards and jeopardise its industry, warned the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in a report on a comprehensive industrial policy for the EU adopted at its January plenary.

Europe wants to lead by example, with a manufacturing industry that protects workers' rights, preserves the environment and invests in innovation. However, all of this has significant costs, which are reflected in the price of its products. To guarantee its industry fair trading conditions, the EU must ensure that global products entering its market abide by the same rules. This was the key message of the EESC's opinion on [*A Comprehensive approach to industrial policy*](#).

"Europe cannot ...It cannot afford to be naïve. Overcapacity, illegal state aid and other forms of unfair competition must be tackled by European regulation, while respecting WTO rules", said rapporteur **Gonçalo Lobo Xavier** (Employers, PT).

The tools to fight these practices must be on the EU's agenda. EU antidumping measures need to be swifter, better monitored and more flexible.

Compared to global players such as China, India and Korea, which have been very active in developing their industrial policy, Europe has no coherent long-term outlook for its industry, stressed the EESC.

A consistent industrial action plan is needed, with binding targets, timetables and instruments to tackle the **four key challenges of the next ten years**: digitalisation, climate change, globalisation and demographic change.

Reshoring at least some sectors of Europe's industry is also key.

The opinion was drawn up at the request of the Bulgarian presidency of the EU. (dm)

EESC urges to swiftly adopt the Commission proposal on safeguarding competition in air transport



The EESC backs the European Commission's proposal on the long-awaited revision of the regulation on safeguarding competition in air transport. In an opinion adopted at the EESC January plenary session, the Committee urges the European Parliament and the Council to promptly approve the revised regulation in order to effectively address distortions in international competition.

The EESC supports the Commission's dual approach to safeguarding fair international competition and has taken a stand by adopting, on 17 January 2018, the [*opinion*](#) drafted by **Jacek Krawczyk**. On the one hand, the proposal gives teeth to existing legislation and equips the Commission with an efficient tool to counteract and prevent distortions of fair competition in aviation. On the other hand, the EU aviation agreements work as an incentive for third countries to comply with EU legislation in exchange for access to the EU market.

"This proposal is yet another important step in the implementation of the EU Aviation Strategy, announced over two years ago. The future success of EU aviation depends on how effectively the strategy is implemented," said **Mr Krawczyk**. "Taking into account the importance of aviation for the EU economy, all stakeholders must be even more involved in the implementation of the strategy," he added.

The revision of the regulation on safeguarding competition in air transport (Regulation 868/2004) is part of a larger package entitled "Aviation: Open and Connected Europe", which also contains guidelines in the following areas: Ownership and control of EU air carriers, Public Service Obligation (PSO) and Air Traffic Management (ATM) continuity.(mp)

The EESC stands firmly behind the priorities of the first Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU

"The success of the Presidency does not depend on the size of the country – it is driven by the political will to push for policies that are crucial for the future of Europe", said **EESC President Georges Dassis** in his welcome speech to the **Bulgarian Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Policy, Zornitsa Roussinova**, at the EESC plenary session in January. **Ms Roussinova** presented to EESC members the four priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency:



- the future of Europe and young people;
- the European perspective and connectivity of the Western Balkans;
- security and stability in a strong and united Europe;
- the digital economy and digital skills for the future.

She also outlined the main topics that the Bulgarian Presidency will focus on over the next six months in the field of social policy and employment:

- the future of work;
- strengthening the social dimension of Europe;
- early childhood development policies;
- equal rights for people with disabilities.

"We are very eager to read the exploratory opinions that the EESC will provide in response to our requests," said **Ms Roussinova**. (sg)

On the photo: Zornitsa Roussinova, Bulgarian Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Policy, and Georges Dassis, EESC President

[EESC calls for financial insurance to compensate cyberfraud victims](#)



Improving legal cooperation between Member States on combating cyberfraud is a step in the right direction, said the EESC in a recent [opinion](#) assessing the Commission's [draft directive on Combating fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment](#). However, the EESC calls for more safeguards to protect users of digital means of payment and mandatory prevention measures to alert them to cybercriminals' ways of operating.

While welcoming the Commission's proposal, the opinion's rapporteur **Victor Alistar** flags up the need to **go beyond investigative and judicial cooperation between national law enforcement authorities**.

The EESC suggests that Member States be required to institute **financial insurance** to compensate the victims of cyberfraud involving payment cards. This financial insurance should cover both **individuals and SMEs**.

In addition, for the fight against cyberfraud to be effective, **economic operators should be legally required to report cyberfraud incidents**.

Cyberfraud involving digital means of payment issued in the euro area is a major issue. According to an ECB report, it amounted to **EUR 1.4 billion** in the EU in 2013. Since then, it has been on the rise.

One of the most vulnerable areas is the payment of **travel expenses** – train and plane tickets, accommodation and other related transactions. Among the people involved in or profiting from this type of cyberfraud are individuals and organisations engaged in terrorist activities.

Prevention should also play a role in combating cybercrime, in the EESC's view. The public should be alerted to the ways in which cybercriminals operate by forging digital means of payment, with law enforcement authorities in the Member States providing awareness-raising and information campaigns explaining the causes, risks and ways for individuals to protect themselves against cyberfraud. (dm)

[Fiscal policy contribution essential to continuing the euro area's economic recovery in 2018](#)



Doz Orrit, ECO 444

The EESC disagrees with the Commission's proposal for a broadly neutral fiscal stance, and instead advocates a moderate positive fiscal stance of around **0.5% of GDP**. In its opinion on [Euro area economic policy 2018](#), the Committee states that the budgetary effort should be borne mainly by countries with current account surpluses and fiscal space.

In view of the remaining fragile, incomplete and atypical economic recovery in the euro area and the changes to the ECB's monetary policies that have been announced, the EESC calls for fiscal policies to support monetary policies. The EESC's recommendations also consider low investment levels, an external current account surplus and a significant labour market downturn, among other aspects.

"A fiscal stimulus with a focus on public investment would both deliver stronger demand in the short term and expand growth potential in the long term, thus addressing the question of public debt sustainability", said the rapporteur, **Javier Doz Orrit** (Workers Group, ES).

Public investment needs to focus not just on infrastructure but also on social investment, and domestic consumption should be promoted mainly through wage increases.

"As regards the application of fiscal rules, we recommend that public expenditure on investment be excluded from the calculations. This would contribute to more inclusive growth and upwards convergence", said **Mr Doz Orrit**.

The EESC welcomes the Commission's policy objectives – sustainable and inclusive growth, resilience and convergence – as well as its

priorities for structural reforms, and believes that reforms must enhance productivity and support the creation of high-quality jobs and the reduction of inequalities. It calls for the implementation of effective measures to combat the harmful erosion of public budgets and supports the necessary steps for deepening the EMU. (jk)

[Driving and rest time periods, working time and posting of workers](#)

The [EESC opinion](#) on "Driving and rest time periods, working time and posting of workers" was adopted at the 531st plenary session on 18 January 2018 with 173 votes in favour, 89 against and 17 abstentions. Rapporteur was Tanja Buzek of the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN). (mp)

News from the Groups

[Social rights and road safety](#)



By the EESC Workers' Group

At its January plenary session, the EESC adopted an opinion on the important role of transport as a key sector of the EU economy. It addresses fundamental questions such as rest times and the posting of workers. The EESC stresses that the amendments to the legislation proposed in the mobility package do not effectively resolve the problems identified in several respects and, in the opinion of the Workers' Group, do not guarantee success in tackling social dumping in the road transport sector. Moreover, in order to ensure better enforcement of cross-border rules, the EESC calls for the establishment of a European Road Transport Agency.

"Against the critical role of pricing in the transport sector, we must come up with rules which can effectively guarantee a level playing field for all road transport operators, irrespective of their size, and for all mobile workers, without creating new barriers to the internal market or cutting back on social legislation", highlighted Rapporteur Tanja Buzek. She added that the internal market must work for all stakeholders and in all Member States, old and new.

EU-wide enforcement of the rules on the posting of workers in the road transport sector is of vital importance to guarantee a level playing field for workers and businesses, and effective monitoring of their enforcement is essential. In this regard, we share the EESC's concern that a maximum coverage of six months and one group of drivers could lead to less effective enforcement of posting rules. (mg)

[EESC divided on posting of workers in transport. Employers' Group against the EESC opinion](#)



By the EESC's Employers' Group

The Employers' Group did not support the EESC Opinion on driving and rest time periods, working time and posting of workers. For the Group, the opinion did not sufficiently reflect differences in views at the Committee concerning the Commission's proposal on the posting of workers

"Applying posting rules to international road transport is about protectionism and limiting freedom of movement. Unfortunately the document the EESC adopted does not reflect these negative consequences. The EU single market is being seriously compromised and thousands of SMEs operating in the transport sector across Europe will suffer" said Jacek P. Krawczyk, president of the Employers' Group.

During the debate, members of the Employers' Group highlighted numerous inconsistencies in the Commission's proposal on the posting of drivers. Without proper infrastructure, stricter rules would be counterproductive and would not improve working conditions.

Members underlined that the proposed rules will create uncertainty and additional paperwork both for drivers and for companies. They drew attention to imprecise definitions in the legislation, which might lead to absurd situations.

The group tabled a number of amendments to the opinion, but they did not gain the support of the rapporteur and a majority of EESC Members. The opinion was adopted on 18 January 2018, during the EESC plenary session, with 193 votes for, 89 against and 17 abstentions. (lj)

[Civil society in the EU: future scenarios for 2030 - extraordinary meeting of the Various Interests Group](#)

By the EESC's Various Interests Group

Following the second day of the February plenary session, Group III will host its extraordinary meeting on "Civil society in the EU: future scenarios for 2030" at the EESC (JDE62).

The aim of this meeting is to present a study entitled "The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030", promoted in cooperation with the Liaison Group. The study was commissioned by the EESC from [CNVOS](#) (Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs (Slovenia)) and [ENNA](#) (European Network of National Civil Society Associations).



Based on desk research of recent analyses and studies, interviews and surveys, the study sheds light on the current state of play of civil society organisations (CSOs) at the national and European level. Its purpose is to examine the main challenges for CSOs and how these should be tackled. It develops five scenarios around major factors for change and includes several specific recommendations and conclusions.

The event will be attended by EESC members and representatives of European civil society organisations and will be moderated by Daniela Vincenti, Editor-in-Chief at EURACTIV. Speakers will include Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso, European Parliament vice-president in charge of relations with the EESC and CoR, Paweł Świeboda, Deputy Head of the European Commission's European Political Strategy Centre, the EESC group presidents, and eminent representatives from the academic world. (ih)

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