



European Economic and Social Committee

# EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil Society

April 2018 | EN

## Available Languages:

bg cs da de el en es et fi fr hr hu it lt lv mt nl pl pt ro sk sl sv

## Editorial



Dear readers,

My term-of-office will soon come to an end. As president of the European Economic and Social Committee, I would like to take the opportunity offered by this final editorial to look back at some of the key moments of the past two-and-a-half years in the work of the EESC.

Against the backdrop of increasing critical public opinion towards Europe, this period has been characterised by a willingness on the Committee's part to broaden and deepen consultations with European civil society so that its positions truly reflect the latter in all its diversity.

Initiatives include the first round of missions at the peak of the migration crisis in the most affected countries, aimed at shedding light on civil society's role in welcoming refugees and migrants and highlighting their needs (2015-2016), the 28 major debates on Europe's future conducted in all Member States (2017) and the systematic consultations on the European Pillar of Social Rights (2016). This all testifies to the EESC's determination to get closer to the grass-roots level to make its voice heard in Brussels.

The work carried out, both independently and in consultation with the Commission, to help the European Citizens Initiative realise its full potential - the power to set the European agenda - and ensure that it doesn't become irrelevant, also points in the same direction. By continuing, year after year, to call on the European Commission to reform the rules to provide citizens with a more effective tool, and by giving promoters of initiatives the possibility to express their views at plenary sessions, the EESC sought to make Europe more receptive to its citizens' wishes.

This is the approach I advocate when faced with criticism, underlining that, while the EU is not perfect, it is still the best guarantee of peace and prosperity for our continent. Its break-up and the return of borders would also mark the return of conflicts. We must therefore preserve it and continue to make it better. I hope my work has contributed to this.

In handing over to my successor, I wish him every success at the head of an institution that will soon celebrate its 60th anniversary by looking to the future.

Georges Dassis

EESC president

## Diary Dates

23/04/2018

Brussels

**European Dialogue on Non-State Climate Action**

05/05/2018

Brussels

**Europe Day**

23/05/2018 - 24/05/2018

Brussels

## EESC's plenary session and celebrations for the EESC's 60th anniversary

---

24/05/2018 - 25/05/2018

Brussels

## Civil Society Days 2018

### In short

#### ["EESC Energy Days" - Civil society should be more closely involved in the EU energy-policy debate](#)



**Social fairness and civil society participation must be at the heart of energy talks at all levels, from the local to the European. The EESC Energy Days, held in Brussels on 7 and 8 March 2018, discussed the state of play and future developments in EU energy policy.**

The **first day** of the conference focused on the **Energy Union**, taking stock of the progress made in achieving its goals and assessing the challenges still faced. Participants discussed how citizens could get involved and benefit from the Energy Union, and explored opportunities to improve individuals' and civil society's economic and political ownership of it.

"This union that we are calling for cannot be achieved without the active involvement of organised civil society, whose role in the process must be specified and made permanent," said **Pierre Jean Coulon**, president of the EESC's Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN).

The [EESC opinion](#) on the third report on the State of the Energy Union is currently being drafted by **Toni Vidan** and **Christophe Quarez**, and is due to be adopted at the April plenary session.

The **second day** looked at the **forthcoming changes to the current Gas Directive**, which are raising concerns among stakeholders.

In its proposal, the European Commission maintains that gas pipelines from and to third countries should comply with the core principles of existing EU legislation. However, some civil society organisations highlight the uncertainty that this new text would create in legal, commercial and environmental terms.

EESC member **Baiba Miltoviča** stressed how important it was to better coordinate the rules relating to external suppliers and achieve a single regulatory framework so that energy was supplied according to the same rules everywhere.

**Ms Miltoviča** will coordinate all contributions from the event, which will feed into the EESC opinion on Amending the Internal Gas Market Directive, also to be adopted at the April plenary session. (mp)

---

#### [The EESC supports citizen participation and good public administration at the UN ECOSOC meeting](#)



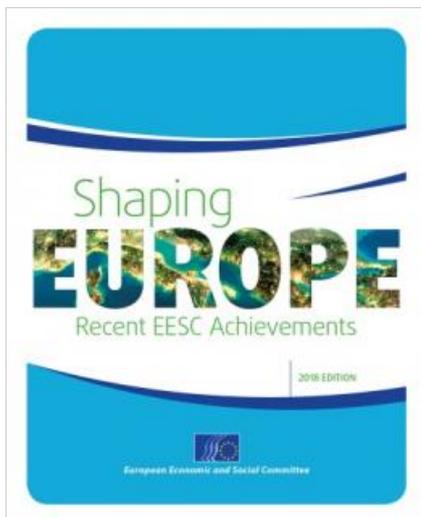
The aim of the ECOSOC preparatory meeting in Prague at the end of March was to highlight the importance of citizen participation, good public administration, and inclusive institutions to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.

"We would be happy to cooperate with the United Nations ECOSOC on the important topic of public participation in decision-making. The European Economic and Social Committee fully supports participative, open and transparent processes for public policy-making," said EESC member Roman Haken, who took part in the meeting.

ECOSOC is the third most important UN body after the General Assembly and the Security Council. It oversees international development in the economic, social, and cultural areas as well as in relation to education and health. (sg)

## New publications

### "Shaping Europe - recent EESC achievements"



The EESC brochure *"Shaping Europe - recent EESC achievements, 2018 edition"* has just been published.

This publication, which is aimed both at the general public and at the other European institutions, provides an overview of **the work carried out by the EESC** in recent years in the main European policy areas, or more specifically on **economic, social, environmental and international issues**.

This brochure is available in six languages: FR, EN, DE, ES, IT and PL, in paper format and on the EESC's website: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications>

Hard copies can be ordered from: [vipcese@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:vipcese@eesc.europa.eu). (fgr)

## EESC News

### Thank you, President Dassis and Vice-Presidents Lobo Xavier and Smyth!



*'United, democratic, solidarity based, peaceful and prosperous Europe close to its people'*

*Georges Dassis, EESC President 2015-2018*

### EESC backs Commissioner Ansip's outline of forthcoming Artificial Intelligence strategy



**EESC rapporteur on Artificial Intelligence (AI) Catelijne Muller says the strategy, as outlined by Commissioner Ansip to the EESC's plenary on March 15, fully meets the Committee's call for the EU to take global pole position in setting the framework for the responsible development and deployment of AI.**

**Ms Muller** said the [announcement](#) made by Commissioners Ansip, Moedas and Gabriel on 9 March to set up an expert group on AI was warmly welcomed by the EESC, as it fully took on board the requests put forward by the EESC in its [own-initiative opinion](#), which called for:

- a pan-European ethical code for AI to make sure that the development of AI is in line with EU values and fundamental rights;
- a European AI infrastructure to foster the sustainable development of AI;
- checks on laws and regulations to see whether they are fit for purpose in an AI era;
- innovation in AI to be boosted, especially AI for the common good.

"I think Europe really took a global pole position at this point", said Ms Muller.

**Commissioner Ansip** described the state of play of the **digital single market** in the EU and reviewed the Commission's most important initiatives to make it a reality: the **abolition of roaming** surcharges, the forthcoming **portability of digital content**, the end of unjustified **geo-blocking** and the **general data protection regulation** to come into force in May.

Others important building blocks were still to come in the areas of **telecoms**, the **e-privacy regulation** and **cybersecurity**.

Commissioner Ansip stressed that **fragmentation** remained a major hurdle and the **cost of non-Europe in the digital single market** was huge: EUR 415 billion a year, according to a European Parliament study.

"It is important for all players to have harmonised rules because while big global players can navigate these 28 different sets of rules,

for our start-ups and SMEs, it is practically impossible to understand those 28 sets of rules, and if we continue with this fragmented digital Europe we will send a very simple message to our people, especially our start-ups: stay at home or go to the US if you want to scale up", said the Commissioner.

Speakers in the debate emphasised the importance of ensuring a fair transition for workers when traditional jobs disappeared and new occupations had not yet emerged.

All agreed that **lifelong learning** must become a reality now more than ever to help everyone find their place in tomorrow's labour market though new skills for new jobs. (dm)

---

## **Future of work - bridging the skills gap is crucial**



**In the opinion on the future of work adopted at the March plenary, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) called on Member States to focus on education and training and adapt their education systems to the needs of the labour markets, which are currently undergoing rapid and dramatic changes brought about by the new digital and industrial revolution.**

According to some studies, technological changes will lead to significant disruptions in employment and business models in some sectors, with 9% of jobs at risk of being displaced due to automation. Another 25% of jobs could be transformed, with half of their tasks becoming automated. At the same time, new jobs will be created and it is expected that nine out of ten future jobs will require digital skills.

According to the EESC, the necessary tools for grasping the job opportunities of the future are quality basic education, high-standard training, lifelong learning, upskilling and the reskilling of all workers.

The EESC said it was concerned about the future of vulnerable groups in Europe, which included the low-skilled. It called on the Commission to take the necessary steps to prevent them from being marginalised as a result of their inability to keep pace with the speed of change.

Drafted at the request of the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU, the opinion on the future of work was presented at the conference on [Bridging the Skills Gap for Job and Growth Creation – The Business Perspective](#) held in Sofia on 22 March. (II)

---

## **"ECI must become a powerful tool for citizen participation"**



**The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is intended to promote active citizenship and participatory democracy, and it has the potential to help overcome the EU's democratic deficit. It is also a tool that can unite Europeans around a cause and thus strengthen the sense of European identity. However, in order to achieve its full potential, it must be accompanied by dialogue and make an appropriate impact.**

In its opinion on [The European citizens' initiative](#), adopted on 14 March, the EESC makes some proposals on how this can be achieved:

- appropriate follow-up measures for successful initiatives: It is particularly important for successful initiatives to be debated in plenary sessions of the European Parliament (EP), to give citizens' initiatives the necessary political dimension;
- dialogue with ECI organisers needs to be stepped up, both during and after the campaign;
- clear, transparent rules for the registration phase are needed;
- the roles of institutional mentor and decision-maker at registration – both in the hands of the Commission – should be separated.

"The EESC sees its role as a facilitator and institutional mentor", said rapporteur [Kinga Joó](#), who reiterated the EESC's willingness to further support initiatives.

The EESC has been involved since the beginning of the debate on the ECI. With its **ECI Day** – to be held on **10 April** this year – the EESC has helped to keep the ECI high on the EU's institutional agenda and to raise its profile. (sma)

---

## **What is not allowed in the real world, must also be a no-go in the virtual world**



**The EESC acknowledges the Commission's Communication on *Tackling Illegal Content Online* as a first step but calls on the Commission to establish programmes and effective measures to provide a stable and consistent legal framework for the efficient removal of illegal content.**

"Spreading illegal content must be nipped in the bud", said [Bernardo Hernández Batailler](#), rapporteur of the opinion on [Illegal content/online platforms](#) which was adopted on 14 March 2018.

This is why the EESC also proposes that special attention should be paid to the development, processing and dissemination of purely informative content which appears – at first glance

– legal but is hiding illegal content.

The focus should also be extended to anything that relates to mega data and the benefits that online platforms obtain by exploiting this data.

"Publishing illegal content, hate speech or incitement to terrorism is not a peccadillo. In order to avoid, combat and remove such material, we need to strengthen measures. This is also important so that we can protect minors", said Mr Bataller.

The EESC believes that online platforms themselves should provide users with the tools to highlight fake news and thus make other users aware that the veracity of the content has been called into question.

Given the impact that digital platforms already have on our daily life and the risks they pose, it is essential to have clear and harmonised legislation all over Europe. (sma)

---

## **EESC calls for momentum to be maintained in Banking Union implementation**



The EESC calls for the [measures proposed by the European Commission](#) to complete the Banking Union and deepen the EMU to be fully implemented without delay.

The Banking Union is vital to the EMU as it will **enhance the financial stability and territorial integrity** of the EU and prevent market fragmentation and disintegration in future crises. The EESC therefore welcomes the Commission's proposals.

"We support the **new approach for a more phased implementation of the third pillar** of the Banking Union, the *European Deposit Insurance Scheme*. It may provide new impetus to the so far unsuccessful negotiations", said **Daniel Mareels**, co-rapporteur for the [EESC opinion](#) on the subject. "The momentum of the implementation process should not be lost."

The EESC backs the measures to **reinforce and consolidate the first two pillars** of the Banking Union. It believes that further efforts to **reduce and share risks in the financial sector** can pave the way to achieving the third pillar and must continue in parallel.

"Remaining stocks of **non-performing loans** and their possible build-up must be addressed as a priority", said rapporteur **Carlos Trias Pinto**. "We also call for the European Monetary Fund to be fully functional as soon as possible, as a backstop to the Single Resolution Fund."

In addition, the EESC recommends paying full attention to the national deposit guarantee schemes during the re-insurance phase and taking a more concrete and formal decision, with the broadest possible consensus, on entering the co-insurance phase.

Finally, the financial industry should commit to implementing the 2030 SDGs and the Paris commitments, and all financial players should focus reliably and on an equal footing on financing the real economy. (jk)

---

## **EESC urges reaffirmation of European social model**



In order to overcome the widening inequalities in European society, social sustainability should be taken into account in all EU policies and the European social model reasserted as a guarantee of social protection for all citizens in the era of digitalisation and globalisation, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) said at its March plenary.

Presenting her opinion on "[A socially sustainable concept for the digital era](#)", the rapporteur, **Giulia Barbucci**, explained that "it is essential that social sustainability is achieved in the same way as environmental and economic sustainability."

The EESC said it fully supported the European Parliament's recommendation that the Commission and social partners should work together on a proposal for a directive on decent working conditions in all forms of employments, including new forms.

It also recommended stepping up efforts to guarantee adequate remuneration and smooth transitions between jobs, in addition to fair lifelong learning opportunities aimed at reducing digital illiteracy.

The Committee called for a more inclusive labour market for migrants and better access to digital jobs for women, and recommended that special attention be paid to people with disabilities.

It also felt that measures should be subjected to an impact assessment with a view to understanding how policies affected the lives of the many. (ll)

---

## **European Consumer Day 2018: Consumers need better protection online**



How best to ensure online consumer protection: this was the focus of the 20th **European Consumer Day**, a joint event by the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** and the Bulgarian Economic and Social Council, held in **Sofia** on **20 March**.

The conference was an opportunity for experts and policymakers to discuss the new challenges to consumer protection posed by digitalisation from both a European and a national perspective. Speakers agreed that the rules on consumer rights protection had to be better applied and enforced. One of the areas where improvement was needed was consumer information on products and services. It is estimated that around 1 % of the population worldwide reads such terms and conditions, while 72% do not know what kind of information is collected about them by companies online.

Concerns about the risks that children could face in the digital era were expressed too. Experts warned that due to growing income

inequalities many children might not have a chance to gain the skills required to access a transformed labour market.

Speakers also drew attention to the free flow of data, which is particularly important for the next generation of digital services. It is estimated that the public sector would have EUR 1.4 billion in additional revenue if data localisation restrictions were removed. Today more than 44 % of the world's population is online, compared to 1 % twenty years ago. Last year, 87% of European citizens had access to the internet. (ia)

---

## [4th European Migration Forum focuses on integrating migrants into labour market](#)



The 2018 European Migration Forum, organised jointly by the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** and the **Commission**, had as its main theme the challenges and opportunities involved in integrating migrants into the EU's labour market. It brought together more than 120 civil society organisations as well as representatives from local and national governments and EU institutions.

Opening the forum, the Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, **Dimitris Avramopoulos**, said: *"It is now time to go beyond the "crisis discourse" about migration that we hear every day, and to focus instead on how to turn migration into a real opportunity, for all of us."*

In his opening speech, EESC president **Georges Dassis** stressed that welcoming refugees was not only a moral imperative, but also a legal obligation to which each country had committed as a member of the EU, and argued that Member States needed to be held accountable. On the other hand, migrants also needed to respect the EU's model on issues such as gender equality.

"With the help of available funds, such as the ESIF and AMIF, measures can be implemented to solve problems and promote employment opportunities for migrants", said **Mr Dassis**.

The discussions held during the forum touched upon many aspects of the process of incorporating migrants into the labour market, such as the need to promote regular employment and decent work, prevent exploitation and tackle discrimination, and the importance of skills validation. (II)

---

## [Welcome to the new editor-in-chief](#)

Ewa Haczyk-Plumley is the new Head of the European Economic and Social Committee's Press Unit as of 3 April 2018.



She is a journalist, art historian, philologist, and Polish literature graduate. She has worked as a senior expert in press and communications in various EU institutions and also in the Permanent Representation of Poland to the EU.

## News from the Groups

### [Bridging the Skills Gap - The Employers' Perspective](#)

*by the EESC's Employers' Group*

**Addressing the skills gap is a multi-dimensional task that requires work not only on education and training systems but also on changing people's mindsets. Due to the rapid pace of change we are seeing today, it is not easy to accurately identify future skills needs. We all have to accept that the future of work will require lifelong learning, to ensure that we constantly adapt our skills to changing needs. These were among the conclusions reached at the conference on "Bridging the Skills Gap for Growth and Job Creation - the Business Perspective", which took place on 22 March 2018 in Sofia, Bulgaria.**

The conference concluded with the joint declaration of the Employers' Group and the Association of Organisations of Bulgarian Employers. This declaration calls for a number of practical measures aimed at adapting labour markets and education systems to the



Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (lj)

needs of the future. These include removing obstacles to job creation, motivating people to develop skills themselves and adopting an approach based on 'flexicurity' in order to adapt labour legislation to the needs of the modern economy.

Within education systems, we need to foster creativity, an entrepreneurial mindset and mobility in education and training at all levels, to invest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) skills, to foster lifelong learning while promoting work-based learning and VET and to strengthen links between businesses and education providers, thereby avoiding skills mismatches. The full text of the declaration can be downloaded [here](#).

The event was organised jointly by the Employers' Group and the Association of Organisations of Bulgarian Employers, and was one of the official events arranged by the

---

## **Funding the European Pillar of Social Rights**



by the EESC's Workers' Group

**We urgently need to relaunch solidarity and to stop nationalism, racism, and short-sighted policies in Europe.**

The European Pillar of Social Rights is fundamental to improving working and wage conditions and social protection systems in Europe, guaranteeing work-life balance, and improving social standards and convergence among EU Member States – including collective bargaining and access to social services.

However, there will be no improvements without money: effective implementation of the Pillar in the Member States will only be possible if they have sufficient financial resources to invest in social policies, thus translating rights and principles into specific policy initiatives.

Investments, and others, must play an important part, as should a fairer taxation system and the inclusion of a Golden Rule, which excludes some social investments – such as education, infrastructure, etc. – from the public deficit, allowing for higher social investment without breaking fiscal rules.

The EESC is currently working on an opinion on the funding of the Pillar of Social Rights, to provide a balanced assessment of how this can and should be achieved by securing more investment, particularly with funds earmarked under the post-2020 multiannual financial framework for the ESF, EFSI, and other EU funds. This opinion adds to the current debate on the next financial framework, which will have an influence on the success of social convergence policies. (prp/mg)

Therefore, mechanisms such as the European Social Fund, the European Fund for Strategic

---

## **How to boost sustainable growth and cohesion in vulnerable regions**



by the EESC's Various Interests Group

**On 6 March, the Various Interests Group held its Extraordinary meeting in Sofia, within the context of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU. It was the last event of the Group under the Presidency of Luca Jahier.**

Some 120 participants, including Bulgarian civil society organisations, representatives of national authorities and Group III Members gathered to discuss the topic '*Supporting Vulnerable Regions and Citizens: boosting sustainable growth and cohesion*'.

The shortages related to mountainous and remote areas (unemployment, lack of social services, transport, communication and infrastructure) lead directly to depopulation and have a disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens.

Following the performance by the Dance Group '*Dance No Different than You*', three panels moderated by Bulgarian Group III Members were at the heart of the meeting:

- Investing in and stimulating vulnerable mountain regions (moderated by Dilyana Slavova)
- Creating opportunities and protecting the rights of vulnerable people (moderated by Diana Indjova)
- Promoting economic development and combating depopulation in non-urban regions (moderated by Bogomil Nikolov)

Keynote speeches were delivered by the Bulgarian Minister for Labour and Social Policy, Bisser Petkov, by the Chairman of the Labour, Social and Demography Committee in the 44th National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, Hasan Ademov, by the President of the Various Interests Group, Luca Jahier, and by Lalko Dulevski, President of the Economic and Social Council of Bulgaria and Member of Group III.

The discussions focused on community-led local development, on the specific role of young people and on the importance of the social inclusion. (ih)

**Soon in the EESC/Cultural events**

---

## Open Doors Day - 5 May 2018



On Saturday 5 May 2018, the EESC, together with the other EU institutions, will open its doors to the public to celebrate Europe Day. The Committee will take the opportunity to present its work to visitors on information stands which will offer a diverse range of activities (quizzes, polls, surveys, etc.). This year's interinstitutional theme is linked to the European Year of Cultural Heritage, and the EESC president's stand will have a particular focus on the subject, under the heading "Shared Cultural Space and Democracy". Twenty-one EESC members will be present to talk about their work and experience. For more information, click <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/europe-day>. (dv)

### **Editors:**

Ewa Haczyk-Plumley (editor-in-chief) Agata Berdys (ab)  
Daniela Marangoni (dm) Katerina Serifi (ks)

### **Contributors to Address: this issue:**

Daniela De Luca (ddl)  
Daniela Marangoni (dm)  
Daniele Vitali (dv)  
Fabiola Giraldo Restrepo (fgr)  
Indre Anskaityte (ia)  
Isabelle Henin (ih)  
Jasmin Kloetzing (jk)  
Laura Lui (ll)  
Leszek Jarosz (lj)  
Marco Pezzani (mp)  
Margarita Gavanas (mg)  
Pablo Ribera Paya (prp)  
Siana Glouharova (sg)  
Silvia M. Aumair (sma)

### **Coordination:**

European Economic and Social  
Committee  
Jacques Delors Building,  
99 Rue Belliard,  
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel. (+32 2) 546.94.76  
Email: [eescinfo@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:eescinfo@eesc.europa.eu)

EESC info is published nine times a year during EESC plenary sessions. EESC info is available in 23 languages. EESC info is not an official record of the EESC's proceedings; for this, please refer to the Official Journal of the European Union or to the Committee's other publications. Reproduction permitted if EESC info is mentioned as the source and a link is sent to the editor. Next issue: May 2018

April 2018/4

05-2018