



European Economic and Social Committee

# EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil Society

May 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

### Let's roll up our sleeves to work out successful recipes for the future of Europe



Dear Readers,

I am pleased to sign this first editorial in my capacity as the newly elected president of the European Economic and Social Committee. As such, I will have the honour of presiding over the EESC's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which we will be celebrating at our plenary session on 24 May.

When you read these lines, we will be finalising preparations for this landmark event.

While the celebrations will certainly afford an opportunity to go over the key moments in the Committee's history, we have decided from the start that this should be more of a forward, rather than backward-looking exercise.

We will therefore be thinking and talking about the EESC's future rather than recalling its past. We will be asserting the Committee's relevance in today's Europe by inviting the top EU leaders and other key personalities that have marked the EUs' recent history to debate the future of Europe with us.

What role is there for the European Economic and Social Committee in today's and tomorrow's Europe? I believe the EESC can be instrumental in building the "Europe that cares and protects" that people are crying out for. All political entities, be it regions, states or supranational organisations stand or fall based on their ability to meet this dual demand.

At the moment, Europe's readiness to fulfil this task is being questioned in many quarters. We must reflect on how to provide practical answers that work, and not let populists, protectionists and extremists lure people into believing that they have better recipes.

The EESC represents a large majority of Europeans - businesses, workers, farmers, consumers, foundations, cooperatives, etc. - organisations that have to come up with answers to their members' problems and needs. Otherwise they simply would not survive.

We must channel this positive strength into building a Europe that cares and protects and into countering Europe's dangerous drift. History teaches us that things can go terribly wrong when the large majority stay silent. It is in the interest of civil society to speak up and engage in the search for solutions to preserve the future of our families, our workers, our citizens, our communities. And so let's roll up our sleeves and work out positive and successful recipes for the future of Europe.

Luca Jahier

EESC President

## Diary Dates

4/06/2018

Brussels

## 3rd European Day of Social Economy Enterprises

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18/06/2018

Brussels

## EESC stakeholder summit on Artificial Intelligence

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11/07/2018 -12/07/2018

Brussels

## EESC's plenary session

### In short

#### [Open Day, a unique opportunity to discover how the EESC works](#)



The European Economic and Social Committee opened its doors to the public on **Saturday, 5 May 2018** to celebrate Europe Day. The EESC presented its activities to the visitors, with a special focus on culture, since 2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

The EESC Open Day was a unique opportunity for citizens to discover the work of the only institution representing organised civil society in Europe, an institution which includes employers, trade unions and groups such as professional and community associations, youth organisations, women's groups, consumers, environmentalists and many more.

Throughout the day, visitors and journalists had the opportunity to learn more about the EESC and exchange views with its Members on the role of civil society in the European decision-making process and on specific themes such as a stronger economy, the fight against planned obsolescence, cybersecurity, participatory democracy, and multilingualism. (mp)

#### [Jordan is key partner for stability of EU neighbourhood](#)



A delegation from the European Economic and Social Committee met local civil society representatives and government officials in Amman on 26 and 27 March. The discussions during the visit focused on the difficulties faced by the country due to the lack of stability in the region. The EESC delegation acknowledged the need for international support and detailed measures, as over the past few years the country has developed a comprehensive approach to the massive influx of refugees, mostly fleeing the war in Syria.

In their various meetings, EESC members expressed the hope that the appointment of the members of Jordan's Economic and Social Council could proceed as soon as possible in order to form a representative institution composed of employers, trade unions and civil society representatives. The EESC delegation underlined the importance of the role of the Jordanian ESC and of consulting organised civil society in the political process to find inclusive and sustainable solutions for the issues the country has to deal with.(sg)

#### [EU and Georgian civil society discuss situation of SMEs and food safety in Georgia](#)

The latest meeting of the EU-Georgia Civil Society Platform (CSP) took place in Tbilisi on 22 March. The members of the platform discussed the implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and adopted a joint declaration. The CSP welcomed the announcement, made earlier in March, of a possible new format for higher-level bilateral sectoral cooperation between the EU and Georgia and expressed its support for the visa-free regime for short stays, which has already benefited a large number of Georgian citizens.

The joint declaration welcomed the progress made on improving the business climate and the situation of SMEs in Georgia but also stressed that the government should do better in meeting SMEs' needs. The CSP also pointed to the lack of gender-sensitive provisions and rules ensuring equal pay for equal work in Georgian labour legislation. The members welcomed the authorities' efforts to improve the nation's food safety system but also pointed out that more needed to be done on the traceability of unsafe food.(sg)



## **EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform concerned about low-pay trends in Ukraine**



The EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform (CSP) urges Kiev to implement more consistent reforms in various sectors and to give absolute priority to the issues of low wages and poverty. These issues were addressed at the 6th CSP meeting in Brussels, where members of the platform discussed how implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement was progressing, the role pay levels play in reducing poverty and their impact on labour migration, and climate change.

The CSP expressed its satisfaction with the new Action Plan to implement the Association Agreement adopted by the Ukrainian government. However, it acknowledged that consistent implementation of reforms was needed in various areas. The CSP also noted that, despite the commitments given, negative trends concerning low wage levels had worsened in Ukraine. The CSP urged Ukraine to withdraw the provisions of the Anti-Corruption Law. In

their joint declaration, the EU-Ukraine Civil Society also denounced the illegal elections held in Crimea in March 2018.(ia)

## **Serbia and EU should step up efforts to ensure country's accession by 2025 remains feasible**



The latest meeting of the EU-Serbia Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) took place in Brussels on 12 April. The JCC's members discussed the current state of play and the work ahead in negotiations on Serbia's accession to the EU, and adopted a final declaration. Serbia was recognised as one of the two frontrunner candidates in the Western Balkan region.

The civil society representatives urged the Serbian authorities to continue working to ensure respect for the rule of law, fundamental rights, judicial reform, the fight against corruption and freedom of the press. It was recommended that a working group for social entrepreneurship be set up, bringing together all relevant stakeholders to work on a social entrepreneurship strategy for the country. The final declaration welcomed the new form of

structured dialogue between the Serbian government and civil society. However it urged the Serbian authorities to involve all relevant stakeholders more effectively when developing public policies. (sg)

## **Europe's Roma keep facing discrimination and ethnic profiling**



Europe's largest minority, numbering more than ten million people, continues to be discriminated against and marginalised in many Member States of the European Union. Human rights NGOs and EU policymakers who gathered at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) warned that, in many cases, police continue to use ethnic profiling against Roma people. A public hearing on "Addressing anti-gypsyism in ethnic profiling practices" took place during the third EU Roma Week, held by the EU institutions in Brussels from 8-12 April.

It was stressed that the most significant problem for Roma communities, particularly in central and eastern Europe, remained their inadequate integration into society, which in the majority of cases resulted in poverty. The speakers also drew attention to increased ethnic profiling linked to counter-terrorism measures and strengthened border controls due to

migration, pointing out that Roma were among the groups affected by this relatively new trend. (ia)

## **EU-Korea Civil Society Forum calls for concrete steps to address gender pay gap**

## [EU-Korea Civil Society Forum calls for concrete steps to address gender pay gap and improve labour standards](#)

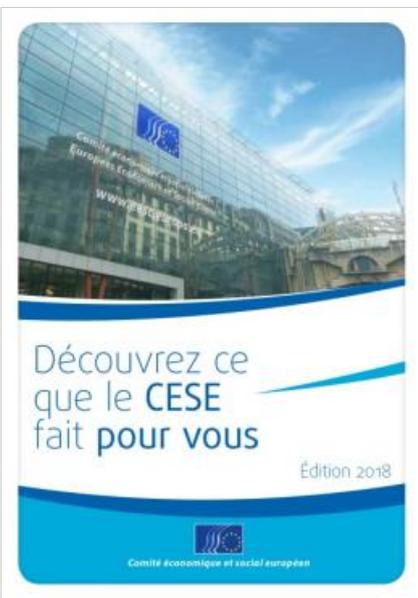


The Civil Society Forum under the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement held its sixth meeting in Seoul on 11 April, co-chaired by Lee Ho-Geun and Georgi Stoev. In their joint statement, the co-chairs emphasised that the uncertain geopolitical environment posed new challenges for EU-Korea relations. They called for shared values and interests to be promoted in the region and for the partnership between Korea and the EU to be made more relevant to citizens' expectations.

The Civil Society Forum recommended that the main emission-intensive sectors in Korea and the EU should make use of the new circular economy models to help decarbonise industries and improve quality of life. The two parties expressed their commitment to a sustainable and inclusive global economy. It was agreed that equal pay for work should be a key priority for both the EU and Korea. The Forum also emphasised the need to conduct a constructive social dialogue with representatives of employers and workers on employment, labour policy and law. (sg)

## New publications

### ["Find out what the EESC can do for you"- New edition available](#)



This brochure will initially be available in six language versions: EN, FR, DE, ES, IT and NL, and subsequently in the 17 other official EU languages, in paper format and on the EESC's website: ([link](#))

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

## [Digital publication - The European Economic and Social Committee \(EESC\) - 60 years of commitment](#)



### **Civil society in action for the Europe of tomorrow!**

Established by the Treaties of Rome in 1957, the Committee held its first plenary session 60 years ago, on 19 May 1958. Since then, the Committee's history has been tied in with that of the European integration process, which it has constantly worked to further.

This digital publication retraces those 60 years of the Committee's commitment to involving civil society, in all its diversity, in the building of Europe, highlighting its successes, its great achievements, its added value and its vision for the future of Europe.

This lively publication, with a wealth of multimedia content, particularly videos and infographics, is addressed to both the informed public (media, civil society organisations, national Economic and Social Councils, other institutions, universities, etc.) and the general public. It has been designed to be a living document, aimed at highlighting the EESC's unique role – as well as that of the civil society organisations it represents – in the European integration process and as a driving force behind participatory democracy.

Geared to reading on mobile devices (tablets and, subsequently, smartphones), it will initially be available in three languages (EN, FR and DE) on [the Committee's internet site](#). (fgr)

## EESC News

### [Citizens at heart of debate on future of Europe](#)

For two days, on 5 and 6 May, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), as the representative of civil society, opened its



doors for the "[European Citizens' Panel](#)", which was attended by more than a hundred people representing the diversity of the 27 Member States, excluding the United Kingdom.

This event was launched by the European Commission, on the initiative of the French government and in partnership with the Committee, which hosted this "première".

The panel's participants shared their concerns, fears and hopes for the Europe of tomorrow, with the aim of identifying 12 key questions of concern to Europeans. These questions relate to all areas of life, including unemployment, education, migration, environment, climate, health, defence and security. In short, each citizen had the opportunity to have their say on the future of Europe.

From 9 May, the questionnaire, which has become a "pan-European tool" will be subject to consultation, under the management of the European Commission. It will be accessible online to all European citizens, in the run up to the May 2019 Summit in Sibiu.

The EESC president, **Luca Jahier**, highlighted the unique nature of this project, which "makes us seek the way by walking", as well as the importance of dialogue on topics proposed by citizens in Europe. The president also assured panel participants that their opinions will be taken into account: " *the diversity of opinions, the cultural and linguistic context, create the richness of our European space*".

According to Thierry Libaert, member of Group III, the European Citizens' Panel should not remain without follow-up after leaving Brussels. It must be extended wherever the participants meet and by continuing the project with the EESC Members in their own Member States.

The idea of hosting the European Citizens' Panel came to light at the EESC's February 2018 plenary session. While attending the EESC plenary session as a guest, Nathalie Loiseau, The French Minister for European Affairs, presented the European consultation process put forward by Emmanuel Macron. It was with this in mind that Georges Dassis (the outgoing EESC president) and Luca Jahier (the incoming president) proposed that the Committee be actively and closely involved, with reference to the successful results of the consultations carried out in 2017 by the Committee in Member States in the framework of the White Paper on the Future of Europe by Jean Claude Juncker. (ehp)

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## [Integration of Western Balkans should remain a top EU priority](#)



EU enlargement, and above all the spread of EU democratic values and legal standards to the Western Balkan region, is in the interests of both the Western Balkan countries and the EU, the European Economic and Social Committee points out in its opinion on the [Economic and social cohesion and European integration of the Western Balkans](#), adopted at its plenary session on 19 April.

"It is crucial that accession of the Western Balkans remain an EU priority," said **Andrej Zorko**, rapporteur for the EESC's opinion. "Promoting EU values in the region guarantees security and stability and enhances social and economic development, as well as democracy and the rule of law, in these countries. And this in turn means stability and security to the EU. It is very important that civil society, including the social partners, play an active role in this process."

Corruption, organised crime, the general weakness of state institutions and the rule of law, and discrimination against minority groups are some of the problems that the Western Balkan countries are facing. Their economies continue to grow but the six countries still remain among the poorest in Europe. It is estimated that full convergence with EU living standards could take as long as 40 years. The EESC therefore believes that the European Commission should develop specific programmes for faster social and economic convergence of the Western Balkans.

"The EESC notes that the EU accession process remains a key factor motivating reform in the countries of the Western Balkans" said **Dimitris Dimitriadis**, co-rapporteur for the EESC's opinion. "The EESC points to the lack of attention paid to the economic and social effects of the reforms carried out, in light of the major differences in economic and social security between the EU Member States and the candidate countries. The EESC consequently recommends that social, economic and territorial cohesion be assessed when evaluating the fulfilment of EU membership criteria." (sg)

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## [Survival of European maritime technology sector depends on firm stance from EU](#)



EESC opinion calls for strong industrial and manufacturing policy based on reciprocity

"The European Commission needs to adopt a strong industrial and manufacturing policy based on reciprocity, otherwise our European maritime technology industry won't survive competition from Asian shipyards," warned **Marian Krzaklewski**, rapporteur for the EESC opinion on the [LeaderSHIP strategy](#), adopted at its plenary session on 19 April.

The EESC urges the Commission to step up the LeaderSHIP 2020 strategy's roll-out and put forward key recommendations for the sector's new LeaderSHIP 2030 strategy.

"Europe needs a specific approach for the shipbuilding and marine equipment manufacturing industry. Like China, the US, Japan and South Korea, European decision-makers must treat this as a strategic sector in Europe's economy", underlined co-rapporteur

[Patrizio Pesci](#).

Such an approach must include:

- a comprehensive OECD agreement to set out rules on subsidies, and potentially also on pricing discipline;
- reciprocity between Europe and third countries as a guiding principle in both bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations;
- a specific financial instrument that would enhance investment in this capital risk intensive sector, etc.

The European maritime technology (MT) sector is a key industrial sector for Europe, but is confronted with many difficulties, not least because of the protectionist policies of East Asian competitors.

Around 300 European shipyards employ 200 000 people and have an annual turnover of approximately EUR 31 billion. Some 22 000 large companies and SMEs produce and supply marine equipment, generating an annual turnover of approximately EUR 60 billion. They employ over 350 000 people directly, and have a global market share of about 50%. (sma)

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## **Securing social triple A rating for EU requires political engagement and proper funding**



**The EESC calls for sufficient funding resources to be put in place for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. Improvements in the Member States and a robust commitment in terms of budget, investment and current spending are needed to make the Social Pillar a reality.**

The progressive implementation of the pillar requires not just the commitment of the Member States but also the active ownership, responsibility and participation of all the other stakeholders involved – and adequate funding measures to reflect this.

*"The key elements for the funding will be **more flexibility in EU budgetary rules for public investment, the full use of European Structural Funds and fair taxation,**" says **Anne Demelenne** (Workers' Group, BE), the rapporteur for the [opinion](#) on the subject.*

The EESC is convinced that **adequate social investment** will be crucial for ensuring Member States' ability to accomplish the stated objectives. Scope for appropriate spending could be created within Member States and with the help of EU programmes. Existing European instruments should be used to support public investment in the Member States.

As **Anne Demelenne** argues: *"The principles of the Social Pillar and the need for its implementation should constitute one of the guiding lines in the upcoming negotiations on the European Union's **post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework**. We urge, in line with the European Parliament, that the current 1% ceiling for the EU's expenditure be increased."*

More public investment within Member States could also be facilitated by **appropriate tax policies** and by invoking a **Golden Rule for public investment with a social objective**. In addition to national public and EU funding, the EESC believes **private sector investment** could make a contribution in some areas.(jk)

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## **EESC outlines further measures needed to achieve stable, prosperous and resilient EMU**



The EESC is firmly convinced that at this juncture the EMU is still not resilient and stable enough to face future crises effectively. Advocating the completion of EMU, it urges decision-makers to reach broader and swifter political agreement on how to achieve a deep and genuine EMU, which is the final objective.

*"Further steps on EMU must be based on a firm common position of all Member States, but a common strategic vision is clearly missing in the current political debate",* said **Mihai Ivascu**, rapporteur for the latest [EESC opinion](#) on the European Commission's [EMU package](#).

**Stefano Palmieri**, ECO section president and co-rapporteur, said: *"The completion of the EMU requires strong political commitment, efficient governance and better use of available finances. New financial instruments for crisis prevention and countering pro-cyclical*

*measures need to be developed."*

The EESC makes clear in its opinion that, among other things, the new **European Monetary Fund** should not function as a golden parachute. Rather, its role should be to prevent bank crises, support economic development and absorb shocks.

In addition, the EESC suggests including the proposed new budgetary instruments in the EU budget, namely a macroeconomic stabilisation function for the euro area and a dedicated **convergence facility** to help Member States that are on track to join the euro area.

The Committee issued a separate opinion on [Support to structural reforms in the Member States](#) in response to the Commission's proposals.

In its opinion, the EESC proposes, among other things, that a clear strategy for the Structural Reform Support Programme be developed and that its financial envelope be increased without penalising the budgets for other equally important funds.

More information can be found on our [website](#). (jk)

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## **Foreign direct investment needs screening to protect national security and public order in EU**

Foreign direct investment is a major source of growth, jobs and innovation and has always been a key factor in supporting economic and social development in the EU. However, it also poses possible risks for national security, and a proper framework for the screening of such investments is needed.

**"Foreign investment in key technologies and in sensitive infrastructure such as energy and water supply and financial services must be controlled,"** said **Christian Bäumler**, rapporteur for the EESC's opinion on foreign direct investment screening, adopted by the EESC during its plenary session on 19 April. **The screening of investments in businesses that are of strategic importance for national security and public order in the EU is patchy and uncoordinated.** Not all Member States have screening procedures in place - in countries without such mechanisms, investments go unscreened. The EESC emphasised that a system at EU level must deal with the differences between Member States, while safeguarding national and European interests.



Over the last 10 years there has been an increase in investment from third countries in the EU, with most of it coming from the USA, Canada and Switzerland, followed by Brazil, China and Russia. There have been concerns that some foreign investors, notably state-owned investors, were interested in acquiring European businesses that possessed key technologies, and in investing in strategic industrial sectors, infrastructure and other assets that are important for the security of the Member States and the EU as a whole.

The EESC welcomed the Commission's proposal for a Regulation establishing a framework for screening of foreign direct investments in the EU, but noted that the extent of the problem is not yet fully known, as the Commission did not carry out an exhaustive impact assessment of investment flows..

**"The proposed EU screening mechanism is a step forward, but it cannot yet fully safeguard EU and Member States' interests. In such a case, at this stage, the system must not become burdensome, time-consuming and costly,"** said the EESC co-rapporteur, **Gintaras Morkis**. (sg)

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## **EESC calls for a European Energy Union that involves and benefits all EU citizens**



**The EESC strongly supports the objectives of the Energy Union and encourages EU society to take full ownership of this project. The Energy Union is not only relevant to sectoral policies such as energy, transport and climate but offers a number of opportunities to make Europe more democratic, cohesive, competitive and just. To this end, an effective energy dialogue with organised civil society at EU, national, regional and local levels is fundamental.**

In the [EESC opinion](#) adopted at the April plenary session, **Toni Vidan** and **Christophe Quarez** take stock of the progress made towards an EU Energy Union, following the release of the European Commission's third report on the subject in November 2017.

Organised civil society must be actively and permanently involved. An effective energy dialogue requires a concerted effort from all EU institutions and their members, both in Brussels and on the ground in the Member States, to discuss the benefits of and issues facing the Energy Union, to involve citizens in drawing up energy transition plans and to organise public debates on how people imagine their energy future in Europe.

The Committee proposes practical solutions to try to overcome the existing barriers: a Social Pact for a Citizens-driven Energy Transition, a European Energy Information Service, a European Energy Transition Adjustment Fund, and a Green Erasmus Pro programme. (mp)

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## **Battle for equal pay may be best won by denouncing stereotypes**



The EESC backs the Commission's efforts to reduce the 16.3% gender pay gap in the EU, but is proposing further action with a special emphasis on combating long-established social and cultural stereotypes which determine educational and career choices for women.

In its [opinion](#) on the Commission's [Action Plan on tackling the gender pay gap](#), the EESC also stressed the importance of pay transparency and pay audits in companies. It also urged the Commission to start collecting individualised data in order to produce more accurate statistics on female poverty which is often masked due to the fact that data are collected per household and not individually.

More precise figures on wages would permit a more informed collective bargaining which is extremely important.

"Social partners have a decisive role to play here because estimates show that a one percent increase in social dialogue brings down the gender pay gap by 0.16 percent," **rapporteur Anne Demelenne** said.

The co-rapporteur for the opinion, **Vladimira Drbalová**, said that major progress would be made if women entered better paid sectors such as science, ICT, transport or construction.

The EESC also argued that Member States had an important role to play, as they should increase their provision of childcare and elderly care facilities, thereby securing a better work-life balance.

If the Commission's efforts yield no results by the end of 2019, the EESC may consider asking it to propose more binding measures, which may include penalties. (ll)

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## **Strengthening Europe's energy networks is key for Energy Union**



**Stronger, interconnected European energy networks are well developed and integrated can the continent's energy systems achieve their purpose: to provide the people of Europe with affordable, secure, sustainable energy in a competitive way.**

In the [EESC opinion](#) adopted at the April plenary session, drafted by **Andrés Barceló Delgado**, the Committee welcomes the Commission's communication on Strengthening Europe's energy networks and highlights the fact that the financial support provided by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) has made a growing number of projects possible across the EU.

"Much still needs to be done," said **Mr Barceló Delgado**. "The interconnection target of 10% by 2020 will not be achieved by many Member States. The causes at the root of these

failures (complex administrative procedures, policy implications, funding, lack of public support) have yet to be properly addressed and are in danger of jeopardising the achievement of the 2030 targets," he continued.

In order to address some pending issues, the EESC therefore makes a number of recommendations, aimed at carrying out better analysis, fully involving stakeholders at an earlier stage and increasing the budget. (mp)

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## Quality apprenticeships in Europe: let apprentices have a say



**Apprenticeship schemes should be shaped with the active involvement of the people directly concerned - apprentices themselves and their organisations. This is the EESC's main reservation regarding the proposed framework for quality and effective apprenticeships, which the EESC otherwise believes will help raise standards across the EU.**

Youth and parents' organisations, student unions and apprentices themselves are not seen as natural stakeholders in developing apprenticeships, but as they are the main beneficiaries of such schemes, they should have a hand in designing, governing and implementing them, says the EESC in an [opinion](#) adopted on 19 April on the proposed [Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships](#).

It is essential to involve the social partners, as the proposal does, but it is also crucial to enlist the support of these other key constituencies, argues the EESC, which drew on the expertise of the European Youth Forum in defining its position.

But apprenticeships cannot solve unemployment. Although they can help improve people's chances of finding a job, unemployment is a complex issue that needs to be tackled from different angles, stresses the EESC.

Overall, the EESC welcomes the proposal, since it provides a common understanding of what constitutes a quality apprenticeship and defines its key elements - a written contract, rules for remuneration, time spent in the workplace, social protection, health and safety, etc.

Support for SMEs in supplying quality apprenticeships is a welcome provision, and transnational mobility for apprentices is also a plus in the EESC's view.

The EESC offers to monitor the implementation of the new framework in the Member States from the perspective of organised civil society.

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## Interests of EU citizens cannot be forgotten when developing new forms of mobility



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) urges the Commission to be more rigorous in facilitating consumer access to new, cleaner and affordable forms of mobility, and to introduce stronger financial support for public transport. The Committee's opinion on *Achieving low emission targets*, adopted at last week's plenary session, discussed the Commission proposal on how to effectively reduce the gas emissions produced by road transport.

The EESC draws attention to the general, technology-neutral approach set by the Commission, an approach which according to rapporteur **Ulrich Samm** is not followed fully in the proposed initiatives. A more flexible approach rather than, for example, fixed emission thresholds or procurement targets, is therefore recommended. The EESC also points out that in addition to its focus on new technologies such as electric cars, the Commission should

consider the considerable potential for improvements in the existing fleet. (ia)

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## ECI Day calls for genuine citizen participation



Six years after the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) was introduced, and following repeated constructive criticism and calls for its improvement, particularly from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and other institutions, the European Commission has finally proposed changes to this important tool of participative democracy.

At the 7th EESC ECI Day, First Vice-President of the Commission **Frans Timmermans** presented the main changes, including lowering the age from 18 to 16 years and simplifying data requirements for signing initiatives.

The ECI Day focused on *Working together*, which aimed to highlight the value of cooperation and shared responsibility in promoting active citizenship.

EESC President **Georges Dassis** welcomed the Commission's initiative as a leap forwards as regards the simplification and reduction of the bureaucratic burden, but regretted that the follow-up had not been reinforced in the current proposal. "Successful European citizen initiatives must trigger dialogue and proper follow-up at EU level", he urged.

In his keynote speech, **Luca Jahier**, the new president of the EESC, emphasised the importance of Article 11 TEU, which imposed a legal obligation on the European institutions to consult and engage in dialogue with civil society and citizens. "A well-functioning ECI should empower citizens; it should give them a voice, a sense of belonging and identity, helping to rebuild trust and to rediscover the solidarity of the European project. The EESC has therefore always been very vocal about the ECI."

In three workshops, participants consistently expressed their wish for the EU to become more participatory and called on European

and national leaders to listen to their citizens. (sma)

## Rethink plastic: behaviour change needs strong legislative framework and viable alternatives



**Cillian Lohan**, a member of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform as well as a member of the EESC, said at a hearing on the **EU Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy**, organised by the EESC, that technology alone would not be enough to drive the transition, but would instead have to work in combination with widespread behaviour change. He was convinced that we could "drive behaviour change if we offer valuable and affordable alternatives". Addressing the way we consume would be a key element in terms of what we could achieve in the future. Referring to the necessary transition to a circular economy, he said that it appeared "compelling to move from the *concept of consumers* to the *concept of users* in terms of over-consumption and waste".

A number of experts from different fields discussed these important issues, and the main findings will provide relevant input from civil society into the EESC opinion being drafted on the above-mentioned Strategy and Directive. (sma)

## News from the Groups

### EESC plenary commemorates 75th anniversary of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising



by the *EESC's Employers' Group*

**With a minute of silence, the plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising - the largest Jewish armed revolt of World War II.**

To mark the occasion, members of the EESC pinned on the yellow paper daffodils that symbolise remembrance of the uprising. On the same day, similar paper symbols were distributed on the streets of Warsaw, Poland.

"It is a paradox: the longer Europeans live in peace and prosperity, the less they remember what the overall goal behind the creation of the EU was. For the EU founding fathers, it was 'never again war'," underlined Jacek P. Krawczyk, President of the Employers' Group, who initiated the commemoration. "This yellow daffodil not only symbolises the victims of the war. It should also be a symbol of resistance against any attempts to divide the community, to divide people with walls, to divide them because of their origin," he added.

In his speech, Jean-Pierre Haber, founding member of CEJI (Centre européen juif d'information) called for action to be taken by all representatives of European civil society to ensure that all Europeans can live in a free and peaceful Europe.

Historians estimate that during the uprising and brutal liquidation of the Ghetto, which lasted over 20 days, 7 000 Jews were shot on the spot, 7 000 were sent to the Treblinka death camp and 36 000 were deported to labour camps. (lj)

### Time to change within Group III



by the *Diversity Europe Group*

Since 18 April, Arno Metzler has officially been president of Group III for the 2018-2020 term of office.

A lawyer with his own practice in Germany since 1983, he has also represented the German liberal professions at the EESC since 2002. Before becoming Group president, he served as vice-president with responsibility for SMEs, Liberal Professions and the Rules of Procedure.

A great Europhile, he deeply believes in the benefits of the EU as a complementary layer of governance and identity. To him, it is crucial that a great deal of energy is focused on 'selling' Europe and its values of tolerance, plurality and inclusion.

Considering that diversity is the strength of our Group, one of his first decisions as president was to change its name from the Various Interests Group to the **Diversity Europe Group** - "a new wording which is clearer, more catchy and which reveals our pride in our diversity".

**Combatting prejudice and populism through responsibility and diversity** will be one of the major priorities of his term of office. A study on the rise of populism in non-metropolitan areas has already been commissioned and will provide the EESC with a better understanding of the factors influencing the public appeal of populism and of the way in which civil society organisations seek to counter it, with a view to doing more to support their activities. The findings of this publication will be presented during a Group conference to be held in Austria in October. Mr Metzler's term of office will also focus on **combatting prejudice and promoting diversity through education**.

In the next two and a half years, his work will be supported by the seven newly elected vice-presidents: B. MILTOVIČA (LV), K. BALON (PL), S. BOLAND (IE), A. GAJDOSIK (AT), M. MACIULEVICIUS (LT), P. TRANTINA (CZ), I. VARDAKASTANIS (EL).(ih)

## Work, new forms of work, and working conditions



by Worker's Group

Employment numbers are constantly in the headlines. However, what is almost as important as how many people are employed is what conditions they work in. This is particularly relevant in view of the latest labour developments and the increase in non-standard contracts, where ECJ [rulings](#) have been necessary to establish that, for instance, Uber drivers are employees, not freelancers.

The concept of 'working conditions' comprises many dimensions, from salary, working hours, health and safety, to benefits, specific duties and so on; this includes 'probationary periods', which in some cases no longer serve their purpose and simply provide a cheap and flexible labour force. It is nonetheless still important for workers to know and understand

these conditions in advance - something that is not always straightforward - and to be notified of any changes as soon as possible, giving them predictability.

To this end, the European Commission is proposing a regulation to develop a coherent framework for this right to know for workers. The proposal does, however, still have some issues, such as the scope of its definition of 'workers'. The fast-paced development of the labour market has created a plethora of different 'new forms of work' such as voucher and platform workers, who, with their non-standard job contracts, are not covered by the traditional definition of an employee.

This is not, of course, something limited to the 'new forms of work': non-standard contracts such as zero-hour contracts and posted and domestic workers have been around for a long time, most of them with very little predictability in their working conditions and therefore little work-life balance in practice. Predictability also makes it possible to balance work and study, or to have another part-time job.

In all these cases, collective bargaining is the key to ensuring proper working conditions, and the reference to this in the proposal is welcome. Particularly as these 'flexible' conditions become more common with the spread of new forms of work, clear and inclusive definitions of workers and employers are needed, in order to ensure that strong provisions for workers are not simply bypassed by the new forms of work, and that the new realities (such as life-long learning and its associated training being paid for by the employer) do not impose an additional burden on workers.

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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.  
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Next issue: July 2018

May 2018/5

07-2018