Editorial

Without peace there is no growth, no prosperity and no future

Peace is something worth fighting for every single day.

The primary raison d'être of the European Union is always said to be that the EU has secured peace among its members for more than seven decades. Another compelling argument for Europe is how it has helped countries of the former Eastern bloc to re-integrate with the West – something that would never have been possible in such a short time without the Union. The European Union gives people a sense of belonging and fosters a European identity.

But peace is not something to be taken for granted; and war is the most terrible experience human beings can go through. For people like me, born in the 1960s, war is still very present. We remember our grandparents' and great-grandparents' stories of wartime cruelty and our parents' tales of post-war poverty, which made us feel shamefully privileged compared to them. When we didn't want to go to school, they would say they wished they had had a chance to get an education like us.

It has taken two generations to build Europe as we know it. Now all of us – to different degrees – are reaping the benefits of Europe.

Today war seems a remote prospect in the European Union. But the impossibility of war cannot be assumed. War does not come like a bolt from the blue. We only need to look back in history – to the 1930s financial crisis that triggered the Depression, plunging millions of people into poverty, and then the Nazis seizing their chance to blame the Jews for all of it. Any resemblance to real events taking place now is …well, something to think about.

Peace is fragile. Poverty, or the fear of it, can make people receptive to the false messages of seducers.

All of us have a duty to stand up to these demagogues, xenophobes and illiberals: to call their bluff, but also to provide real answers to the challenges ahead, the challenges of digitalisation, robotisation, climate change and migration.

Finding solutions requires a culture of compromise. Seeking compromise involves listening and speaking to each other, understanding each other's point of view and countering arguments with better arguments, but also making concessions.

In the Committee we have put compromise at the centre of our work. This guarantees that the opinions and concerns of all citizens – employers and workers – are respected.

Politicians in the Member States and at EU level also need to promote what unifies, not what divides, and to seek compromises that can be accepted in their countries and at European level. This requires a culture of mutual respect and respect for Europe's values.

I am convinced that we can reach good compromises that are consistent with our European values, whether in relation to internal EU issues, our neighbourhood policy or our stance in the world.

Without peace, there is no growth, and without growth there is no sustainable development. Let us not take peace for granted, but work together to preserve it by building bridges: everybody wins when we live in peace.

Luca Jahier
EESC President
**Diary Dates**

22-23/11/2018, Athens, Greece
12th EESC Civil Society Media Seminar - Reasserting Europe's values

28/11/2018, Brussels
EESC Consumer Summit

12-13/12/2018, Brussels
EESC plenary session

**In short**

**EESC delegation debates social dialogue and youth policy with Albanian partners**

Members of the European Economic and Social Committee met with representatives of Albanian civil society in Tirana on 24-25 September to discuss the state of social dialogue in Albania and debate youth policy and youth participation in the country.

Dilyana Slavova, president of the EESC’s External Relations Section (REX), and Dragica Martinović Džamonja, president of the EESC’s Western Balkans Follow-up Committee, led the EESC delegation at the meeting with H.E. Luigi Soreca, newly appointed head of the EU’s delegation in Albania. In view of the possible start of EU accession negotiations with Albania in 2019, it was stressed that civil society, including youth organisations and the social partners, should be genuinely involved in all stages of the accession process.

Ms. Martinović Džamonja held bilateral meetings with high-ranking officials, including Lindita Nikolla, Minister of Education, Sports and Youth, Dajna Sorensen, Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy responsible for Employment and Vocational Education and Training (VET), Vasilika Hysi, Deputy Chair of the Albanian Parliament and Gent Cakaj, Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs. During these meetings, Ms. Martinović Džamonja explained that the purpose of the EESC, as the voice of organised civil society at EU level, was to share good practices and expertise from across the EU regarding public consultations and participation in decision-making processes. Progress made by Albania in many areas in recent years was acknowledged, but it was equally stressed that the implementation of reforms needed to continue at a steady pace in order for Albania to progress towards accession.

The meetings were held in preparation for the 7th EESC Western Balkans Civil Society Forum, to take place in 2019. The EESC’s Western Balkans Follow-up Committee intends to share the main conclusions from the mission with other EU institutions.

The EESC’s Western Balkans Follow-up Committee, meeting up to three times a year, was established in 2004 to follow political, economic and social developments in the region and encourage the development of civil society and consolidation of democracy in the region. (ks)

**Five questions to Eleonora Di Nicolantonio**

Eleonora Di Nicolantonio is the new Head of the EESC Communication Department as from 1 October 2018, taking over from Peter Lindvald-Nielsen.

1. **You are starting in your new position. What are your main objectives for the Communication Department?**

The main objective for the Communication Department is to succeed in the challenging task of ‘Communicating the Committee’, using the various tools available, from the more traditional (press releases, newsletters, brochures, etc.) to the more recent (digital publishing, social media, etc.). The EESC is a unique institution in the EU panorama and the Communication Department, through its Press, Online, Visits and Conferences units will keep on working hard to make the voice of civil society heard where it counts.

2. **What are your views on enhancing the visibility of the EESC in relation to the main EU challenges in 2019?**

It is a troubled and interesting period for the Union, with the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework proposals (on which the EESC was the first institution to take a formal position), the upcoming European elections, and Brexit looming on the horizon. In view of all this, it is not only about the EESC’s visibility, but also the EESC’s potential to play an active and useful role via the work of its members and their valuable network of organisations.

3. **What role would you like the EESC to develop during the campaign for the European elections?**
The Communication Group has recently adopted a fully-fledged "communication action plan" linked to the European elections with various actions and projects (from the youth event to the going local visits). It is the uniqueness of the EESC that will enable our members to play a special role in the run-up to the elections, as they can simultaneously be multipliers (via their grass-roots networks), EU ambassadors and, why not, influencers!

4. With your experience of working for many years at the Committee, how would you define the real strength of the EESC in comparison to other EU institutions?

At the risk of repeating myself, it is its members. As the authentic voice of organised civil society.

5. What is your motto, the fundamental principle which guides your actions and your thoughts?

"Follow your heart, but take your brain with you!" (ehp)

#JubelFestival - EESC members discuss new ideas for the future of Europe

An opportunity to exchange views and a learning experience, the Jubel Festival, the very first festival on European democracy in Belgium, took place on Saturday 22 September 2018 in Park Leopold in Brussels. EESC members Pierre Jean Coulon, Ronny Lannoo, Thierry Libaert and Daniel Mareels led a debate on the future of Europe, one that was particularly relevant in view of the upcoming European elections.

Hundreds of participants gathered to discuss the state of play of the European Union and put forward their ideas for the Europe they want. People of all ages, from all backgrounds and nationalities, tapped into the potential of the European democracy festival to talk and listen to each other, get inspired, and exchange opinions with European political leaders, civil society organisations and experts.

The EESC members unanimously emphasised that, with the European elections fast approaching, there was no time to waste to deliver on promises, and focused on three key points:

- building a sustainable and inclusive Europe (Digital Single Market, Banking Union, Social Pillar, Energy Union);
- managing migration bearing in mind the principles of solidarity and the rule of law, which are at the core of any lasting compromise;
- making the EU people-centred once more, enabling its citizens to achieve a better quality of life. (mp)

Understanding Europe in one's mother language

The European Economic and Social Committee is holding an exhibition entitled The EU speaks your language to mark the 60th anniversary of the European Union's first legal act, Regulation No 1/58, which determined the languages to be used by the EU institutions. The exhibition is a tribute to a multilingual Europe and its richness.

On Wednesday 19 September, the EESC hosted the opening ceremony, which was attended by EESC President Luca Jahier and French philologist and philosopher Barbara Cassin, a member of the Académie Française and director of France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). A debate on the role of languages in the EU was moderated by Isabel Caño, EESC Vice-President for Communication.

Opening the exhibition, Luca Jahier focused on the role of culture in European Integration, "a beacon of hope for the future of Europe". Languages are part of heritage and culture and help us find our soul, he said. They can be "a source of conflict, but also lead to listening and dialogue". Isabel Caño noted that, thanks to the multilingual system, citizens have the right to communicate with and understand Europe in their mother tongue. "Diversity begins with languages", she said. Barbara Cassin stressed that "translation can help improve the quality of European integration". The debate also focused on questions about the complexity of translation, the place of "globlish" and Europe's regional languages.

The exhibition consists of a series of panels featuring the history of Regulation No 1/1958 and how, with the passing of time, the developing European Union has supported fundamental values such as equality, diversity and multilingualism. The exhibition, which is being held in collaboration with the Committee of the Regions, is part of the initiatives marking the European Year of Cultural Heritage. It is open to the public until 12 October 2018. (ab/dm)

EESC News

Projects from 27 countries contend for the EESC Civil Society Prize 2018

The EESC has received 148 applications for its prize, which this year celebrates innovative initiatives promoting identities, European values and cultural heritage in Europe.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the voice of organised civil society at EU level, launched the EUR 50 000 prize in June. The applications, which closed on 7 September, attracted candidates from 27 EU Member States, showing that civil society's interest in the prize has increased since 2017, when only 20 countries were represented.

With 24 projects submitted, Italy is boasting the highest number of contestants in 2018. There are also 13 candidates from Germany.
and Belgium, and 11 from Greece. The applications will be evaluated by a panel of 10 experts and winners are expected to be notified towards the end of November. The award ceremony will take place on 13 December 2018 during the EESC plenary session in Brussels.

The prize will be awarded to a maximum of five winners

The EESC Civil Society Prize is open to all civil society organisations officially registered within the European Union and acting at local, national, regional or European level. It is also open to individuals.

Now in its tenth year, it was launched by the EESC to reward and encourage tangible initiatives and achievements by civil society organisations and/or individuals that have made a significant contribution to promoting the common values that underpin European cohesion and integration.

More information about the prize can be found on our webpage - EESC Civil Society Prize 2018.

EESC to advocate an ambitious EU budget of at least 1.3% of EU GNI

At a plenary debate in September with Günther Oettinger (Commissioner for Budget and HR) on the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the EESC called - in line with the European Parliament’s position - for an ambitious budget of at least 1.3% of GNI. This volume would provide the EU with the tools to tackle current and future challenges. An agreement on a robust budget before the European elections in May 2019 would send an important political message and ensure that important spending programmes could start without delay.

Javier Doz Orrit, rapporteur of the EESC opinion on the subject, said with regard to the Commission’s budget proposal: “We support the structure and the priorities of the proposal as well as the measures for simplification, flexibility and synergies, but a further decrease in the volume of resources, given the state of the EU economy, is not acceptable”.

Mr Oettinger defended the planned budget decrease from 1.16% to 1.11% of GNI. The departure of the United Kingdom, which would result in a shortfall in income, and the unwillingness of some Member States to contribute more, formed the basis for this decision. The Commission’s proposal needed to be ambitious but realistic in order to ultimately achieve unanimous agreement.

The EESC members said they could on no account accept a severe budget cut for cohesion policy or the CAP. Both policies would need to at least maintain their current budget envelope.

The Commissioner regretted the budget cuts for these programmes but considered them appropriate. The cuts were the consequence of the budget decrease and the introduction of new political priorities.

In this regard, the EESC supports the introduction of new own resources for the budget to raise revenue. It regrets that the Commission's proposal only includes a part of the proposals of the High-Level Group on Own Resources.

Related statements:
President Luca Jahier
Rapporteur Javier Doz Orrit

EESC conference calls for real commitment to an ambitious cohesion policy post-2020

The European Commission’s proposals for cohesion policy post 2020 include many positive aspects but do not go far enough. A cohesion budget that has been cut by 10% in comparison to the previous one will be insufficient to meet the needs of the current political agenda and environment. A final agreement on the EU budget 2021-2027 must be reached before the 2019 EU elections, in view of the challenges the EU is facing.

These are some of the main conclusions reached during a conference recently hosted by the EESC in view of the preparation of several opinions on the Commission’s cohesion package, which was put forward as part of its Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)
proposals. During the conference, it was stressed that a real commitment to regional development and cohesion policy was needed. At a key moment for the future of the EU, an ambitious policy could be instrumental in countering growing Euroscepticism and other political and socio-economic challenges, providing real benefits to people’s lives and having an impact on the perception of EU policy. A real commitment should first and foremost be reflected in a clear strategy and appropriate budgetary provisions. Both ought to be aligned with the political environment in order to be effective and meet citizens’ expectations. Most participants felt that the budgetary provisions from the previous MFF for cohesion policy should at least be maintained. The credibility of the EU was at stake.

Speakers also said that the co-financing rate must be maintained in order to ensure the accessibility of funds for all beneficiaries.

The EESC opinions on the Commission’s cohesion package will be put to the vote at the plenary in September and October 2018. (jk)

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### Closing the digital gender gap would boost Europe's GDP by 16 billion EUR

The digital gender gap is a consequence of discrimination against women, which already starts in early childhood. The EESC suggests a multi-level approach and holistic policies addressing different sources of inequality.

"The education system is the main policy area to be addressed. We need to tackle cultural and also linguistic stereotypes, and it is particularly to the latter area that we can all contribute", says Giulia Barbucci. "Girls (and boys) must be provided with different role models. In the 21st century it is high time that we address gender stereotypes and tackle them at their deepest social and cultural roots."

It is essential to ensure digital literacy and education for all, and teachers and trainers must therefore be familiar with the use of information and communication technologies.

Girls' and women's interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) must be raised – for instance by presenting female digital role models and successful female entrepreneurs, and also by showcasing the possibilities and opportunities for a successful professional future with greater knowledge of STEM subjects. This is even more necessary in view of the growing importance of ICT-related education and cross-cutting, entrepreneurial, digital and soft skills, such as empathy, creativity and complex problem solving, which are skills mainly attributed to women.

Lifelong learning is essential in preventing exclusion from the labour market, particularly for women. The role of social partners is crucial here. "Social partners generally need to play a key role in order to guarantee fair working conditions and access to social protection. This is also necessary with regard to the 'gig' economy", states Ms Barbucci. (sma)

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### Adequate social protection should be guaranteed to workers in all employment relationships

Access to social protection is a key element in a fairer society, yet for many people on Europe’s labour market and in particular for those in new forms of work or for the self-employed, that access is becoming increasingly inadequate, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) warned in its opinion on the European Commission’s proposal for a Recommendation on access to social protection.

The EESC urged authorities at all levels, as well as civil society and social partners in the European Union, to work together towards restoring social sustainability "with a broader objective of creating a level playing field in the social area, where everyone under the same rules and at comparable conditions can enjoy access to social protection."

"The EU must encourage equality among European citizens and we need to talk about social sustainability of our societies" the rapporteur for the opinion, Giulia Barbucci, told the plenary. "Our task is to reconfirm the European social model and to rebuild trust in the EU and thus combat the proliferation of Euroscepticism. This will have an effect on the future of the EU."

The EESC called on the Member States to explore ways of funding social security systems in a way which not only ensures the sustainability of these systems, but also makes them more inclusive so as to guarantee access to those systems for people in new labour relationships and for the self-employed, as well as for all vulnerable groups. (II)

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### ECI Minority SafePack presented at the EESC

At the EESC plenary on 20 September, the initiators of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Minority SafePack presented their request, which is aimed at improving the protection of national and linguistic minorities in Europe.

The proponents of the 5th successful ECI, represented by Loránt Vincze, thanked the EESC for being the first EU institution to give this successful initiative a platform.

The initiators of this successful ECI feel that the rights of national and linguistic minorities are not always respected and in many cases the languages and cultures of minorities are even endangered.

In his statement, Mr Vincze also criticised the ECI as an instrument, saying it was excessively complicated and expensive for ordinary citizens. This has also been a major EESC complaint for many years, which has finally convinced the Commission that a revision of this important instrument for citizens' participation at EU level is necessary. This review is currently on its way, with the Commission,
Consumer rules should both protect consumers and help traders face disruption brought by booming e-commerce in Europe

European business and consumer representatives united in a lukewarm welcome of the Commission's proposed New Deal for Consumers, at the European Economic and Social Committee's plenary session on 20 September. Taking a position on the package, the Committee wondered whether the New Deal does live up to its promise of making consumer legislation in Europe fit for the digital age. Focusing on the actual enforcement of existing consumer protection rules should have been a priority, in the EESC's view.

While welcoming the fact that the Commission has at long last overcome its uncertainty about collective redress, the EESC would have liked to go further in making group actions possible and accessible.

One of the shortcomings of the proposal is that no provisions are made for consumers to opt in or out of a collective redress action.

The EESC believes that the Commission should also tackle the issue of how to fund consumer and civil society organisations tasked with defending consumers' collective interests, asking Member States to support the creation of litigation funds.

The Committee believes that the Commission should have focused on the implementation of existing rules on product safety, market surveillance, unfair commercial practices and cooperation between the Commission and consumer authorities in the Member States.

The Committee is appreciative of some elements of the Commission's proposal. To extend consumer rights to all digital services, including apparently free digital services is a very welcome update, as is introducing specific criteria for dissuasive fines, amounting at least up to 4% of the trader's turnover, against companies that infringe rules.

Measures to protect consumers against "dual quality", particularly in food products, are much needed to make consumers, some of whom feel treated like second-class citizens, feel equal across Europe.

EESC trader and consumer representatives, however, acknowledged that their views on specific issues could not be reconciled.

While traders are in favour of updating, simplifying and adapting pre-contractual information, consumers think that this would lower the level of protection.

On the right for consumer withdrawal from online contracts, businesses – particularly SMEs – are in favour of scrapping the obligations to accept goods bought online and returned after being used rather than simply tried out, and to provide reimbursement before they can inspect the returned good for damage. Consumers believe this proposal risks limiting consumer rights without evidence of the widespread abuse of such rights.

As for aggressive commercial practices, traders believe that giving Member States the power to limit door-step selling risks stigmatising an entire economic sector, and would like to see all aggressive practices targeted. Consumers support the measure if applied to well-defined categories of goods (pharmaceuticals, weapons) for health and safety reasons. (dm)

EESC calls for inclusive AI that puts workers first when smart technology is introduced into the workplace

The EU needs to ensure that the AI revolution does not endanger the quality of work in Europe. Interactions between workers and machines must be regulated so that humans never become underlings to machines, argues the European Economic and Social Committee in a report adopted at its September plenary.

The EESC believes that it is crucial to define the relationship between humans and machines, how autonomous the latter can be, and how they will complement the work of human beings. It urges the Commission to address these questions in the ethical guidelines it is preparing.

"It is not ethically acceptable for a human being to be controlled by AI or seen as the underling of a machine which issues orders on how, when and what kind of tasks should be performed. However, at times it would seem that we have already crossed that particular ethical Rubicon," said rapporteur Franca Salis Madinier.

The European Commission's AI strategy, with its strong focus on education, training and building up digital skills, is useful to curb social polarisation, but is only a partial response to the complex challenges involved. The EESC points to three instruments of social dialogue that can help ensure a socially acceptable transition:

- inclusive AI, involving workers in the practical processes of introducing AI into the workplace, in order to facilitate acceptance;
- anticipating change through social dialogue, looking into how production processes will change businesses and sectors;
- socially responsible restructuring when redundancy plans become unavoidable, exploring all possible alternatives to layoffs.
The EESC also warns against the dangers of applying algorithms to the recruitment of workers and recommends that the Commission's ethical guidelines enshrine principles of transparency.

With accidents already being reported as a result of interactions between humans and machines in the workplace, the EESC calls for emerging health and safety risks to be clearly identified and provision to be made in EU law covering workers who are exposed to them.

Finally, the EESC would like to see the Commission launch a debate on how to finance social security systems in the future, since the current systems, based mainly on revenues from the taxation of work, will no longer be sustainable. (dm)

All unfair trade practices in the food supply chain must be prohibited and all operators protected

Unfair trading practices (UTPs) result in negative economic, social and environmental effects. The food supply chain is particularly vulnerable to UTPs, as the Commission has recognised. However, its proposal for a directive on unfair trade practices in the food supply chain does not go far enough.

"The power concentration in the food chain is increasing, and farmers, workers, SMEs and consumers are the ones to suffer the most. It is not enough to adopt a minimum harmonisation approach. We need an EU legal framework banning all abusive practices", reiterates Peter Schmidt. Furthermore, agricultural non-food products and feed also need to be covered by the legislation.

Another EESC proposal relates to the enforcement mechanisms, which need to be much stronger and ensure that the anonymity of the complainant is protected. Enforcement could take the form of a specific ombudsman procedure, class action and law enforcement by the authorities. To facilitate the complaint process, written contracts should be mandatory and would bring more fairness in the negotiations.

Regarding the scope of protection, the EESC considers it necessary to extend it to all operators within and outside the EU, because even when large operators are victims of UTPs - the pressure will inevitably be passed on to the weakest actors in the chain.

Moreover, the fact that food is sold below cost price is unacceptable. "We want an effective ban on the sale of goods below the cost of production in the food trade", stressed Mr Schmidt. "Producers, like farmers, need to be paid a fair and just price. They should receive an income that is adequate for investment, innovation and sustainable production." (sma)

EESC calls for mandatory measures on online platforms to counter disinformation

Social media platforms should become more responsible and stick to strict rules. The Committee agrees with the European Commission that this would represent a great leap forward in tackling disinformation. However, the Commission proposal lacks practical steps to achieve these objectives. In the opinion put together by Martin Siecker and adopted at the EESC plenary session on 19 September 2018, the EESC urges the Commission to approve compulsory measures.

The growth in organised disinformation from various state and non-state actors poses a real threat to democracy, as the proper functioning of a democratic system is built on well-informed citizens who make choices on the basis of reliable facts and trusted opinions.

One of the major problems with disinformation is that it is virtually impossible to check the identity of the sources throughout the web. On top of that, people and organisations who operate in cyberspace with malicious intent use a fake identity. "Technology is not good or bad, but it can be used in a good or a bad way. It depends on who is behind it," said Martin Siecker. "This is why we have to fight against disinformation on the same basis and tap into the potential of new technologies to inform people safely and correctly," he concluded. (mp)

New Commission digital market proposal will protect SMEs

The new regulation on the digital single market proposed by the European Commission will not only protect e-commerce consumers, but - for the first time ever - also SMEs. Businesses operating on online platforms and search engines will be able to resolve possible conflicts out of court. This is the progress highlighted by the opinion drawn up by Marco Vezzani and adopted by the EESC plenary session on 19 September 2018.

According to a Commission study, almost 50% of European businesses operating on online platforms encounter problems. In 38% of cases, problems arising from contractual relations are not resolved, while in 26% they are resolved, but only with difficulty. To date, European legislation has focused on defining the relationship between businesses and consumers in online trade (B2C), whereas the relationship between businesses and online platforms (B2B) has never been dealt with decisively.

For this reason, with a view to increasing fairness and transparency, the Commission has decided to tackle the business relationship between SMEs and online platforms as part of the review of the digital single market strategy. "We welcome this Commission proposal as a first attempt to regulate B2B relations in the area of e-commerce and to protect business users of online intermediation.
services,” said Mr Vezzani. “However, this regulation alone cannot resolve all the problems of the digital single market,” he
continued. “Global players and business users, in particular SMEs, have a different strength in this highly dynamic and complex
market. The Commission should establish clear boundaries and relationships between stakeholders and combat abuse of a dominant
position.” (mp)

The EC's environmental action plan is severely lacking in both ambition and resources

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has warned that the
European Commission’s environmental action plan, aimed at improving the poor
and uneven implementation of EU environmental law and governance across the
EU, shows a serious lack of ambition and resources, proposing measures that are
too weak to adequately and uniformly sanction non-compliance by Member
States.

“This is only a tiny fraction of what is needed to ensure that environmental legislation is
implemented,” the author of the opinion Arnaud Schwartz said. “We think that non-
compliance with EU law needs to be addressed at an appropriately high level and in a timely
manner, which is not proposed in the current communication.”

In the EESC’s view expressed in a recent opinion, the Commission – as the “guardian of the
treaty” – must ensure that environmental rules are enforced and has the right to instigate
enforcement proceedings as it has a key role in protecting this common EU interest,
especially in the light of the current serious level of environmental degradation.

However, the plan only talks about capacity building at the level of Member States. Another objection is that it suggests measures
solely to counter non-compliance caused by confusion or poor understanding, without addressing other important reasons such as the
lack of political will.

In order to properly monitor environmental compliance, Member States and the Commission should secure substantial funding for
additional staff, the EESC concluded. (II)

EESC backs Commission proposals to invest in smart, safe and sustainable mobility

EESC President Luca Jahier and European Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc
engaged in a lively debate on mobility at the EESC plenary session on 20
September 2018. An appropriate regulatory framework for a well-functioning
Single European Transport Area, digitalisation in land transport technology,
better interoperability between the various existing electronic road toll systems
and investment in clean electricity were at the heart of the debate with EESC
members.

The Third Mobility Package was published in May 2018 and finalises the Commission’s
ambitious agenda for modernising mobility. The EESC will discuss and adopt its opinions on
this subject at its October plenary session.

“The EESC carefully followed all the mobility packages and actively contributed to shaping the new policies,” stated Mr Jahier. “We
are happy to see that the Commission has taken action with the ‘Europe on the Move’ initiatives for a fundamental modernisation of
European mobility and transport. We support the Third Mobility Package. We are joining forces to invest in sustainable, safe and smart
mobility.”

Ms Bulc highlighted that the three mobility packages reflected the European Commission vision of focusing on decarbonisation,
digitalisation, investment and innovation. “Our objective is to have European mobility that is safe, secure, clean, inclusive and
efficient,” she said, concluding that “in particular, with the Third Mobility Package, our target is safe mobility with zero fatalities, clean
mobility with zero pollution and autonomous mobility with zero paper”. (mp)

EESC advocates stronger Connecting Europe Facility after 2020

A stronger budget, more synergies between networks, continued technical
support, reaffirmed commitment to investment in electricity projects, and dual
use of civilian-military infrastructure. In the opinion put together by Aurel
Laurentiu Plosceanu and Graham Watson, which was approved at the EESC
plenary on 19 September 2018, the EESC broadly supports the new Connecting
Europe Facility (CEF) regulation for 2021-2027 and points out areas where there
is room for improvement.

The European Union will invest in trans-European transport, energy and digital networks
through the reformed CEF programme. Up-to-date and high-performance infrastructure is
key to helping connect and integrate European regions, stimulating job creation and
achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

“The CEF is one of the most successful EU programmes and is of strategic importance for
the integration of the internal market, the completion of the Energy Union, smart mobility
and the opportunity for the EU to deliver tangible added value for citizens, social cohesion
and businesses,” stated Mr Plosceanu. “We must not allow regulatory authorities in
Member States or at EU level to frustrate electricity interconnection, for example, by
“freezing out schemes which are privately financed. If we are to meet our climate goals we will need both public and private finance in trans-European networks,” concluded Sir Graham. (mp)

News from the Groups

The European social model - can we still afford it in a globalised world?

By the EESC’s Employers’ Group

To remain successful socially, we need economic success. To ensure that the European social model continues to be sustainable, we have to improve its efficiency and increase Europe's productivity. These were the key conclusions of the discussion on The European social model - can we still afford it in a globalised world?, which took place in Sopot, Poland, on 27 September 2018.

The EU accounts for 7% of the world’s population, 20% of global GDP and at least 40% of global public spending on social protection, noted Jacek Krawczyk, President of the EESC’s Employers’ Group. Nevertheless, a feeling of exclusion continues to grow among European citizens, as does populism, he said.

The participants agreed that a proper balance between economic and social policies was needed, but there was disagreement about how this balance should be proportioned. For BusinessEurope’s Markus Beyrer, boosting competitiveness remains a priority. In his view, the strength of the European social model is attributable to the variety of national solutions and this approach should be maintained.

Economic, social and environmental rights must all be placed on an equal footing. Social rights are also human rights, underlined Katarzyna Gardaphadze of the OSCE.

Maciej Witucki, president of the management board of Polish company Work Service, reminded attendees that in order to finance social systems we needed to tax companies and workers and that in order to provide jobs we needed to educate people properly.

The European social model should not be seen as a cost but as an investment. There is a need for true social dialogue to dispel distrust between workers, employers and the state, emphasised Dorota Gardias of the Polish Trade Unions Forum.

Hans-Peter Klös, from the Cologne Institute of Economic Research, pointed out that without increasing Europe's productivity it would be difficult to preserve the European social model.

The discussion took place at the European Forum for New Ideas, organised by the Polish Confederation Lewiatan. (jl)

Turning Euroscepticism around

By the EESC’s Workers’ Group

The Workers’ Group met this month in Vienna to discuss the Austrian presidency, along with the threats faced by workers and citizens in Europe and the trade unions’ strategies to address them.

Racism, xenophobia, nationalism and right-wing populism are growing, fuelled by years of neoliberal policies that spread popular discontent as inequality and poverty rose. The lack of national solidarity has been reflected at European level, where Member States have seized every opportunity to water down the social agenda for Europe. The Social Pillar, which promised to address the situation, has so far been ineffective and lacks enough resources and mechanisms. At the same time, some national governments are openly challenging the basis of democracy and the rule of law and attacking civil society and trade unions.

At this critical time when workers' rights and living conditions are at stake, the Workers’ Group gathered at the seat of the EU presidency to discuss what Trade Unions can and should do to turn this situation around before it is too late. Participants included, among others, Wolfgang Katzian, president of the Austrian Trade Union Federation ÖGB, Raimund Löw, renowned journalist and historian, and Hannes Swoboda, former head of the S&D Group in the European Parliament. (ppr)

Fighting populism is everybody's business

By the EESC’s Diversity Europe Group

Economic progress and social stability are two excellent weapons to counter Euroscepticism, but they are not enough. At a conference held in cooperation with the Vorarlberg Chamber of Labour in Feldkirch, Austria, on 11 October 2018, the EESC’s Diversity Europe Group looked at how and why populism has emerged in the EU and pointed to the key role civil society can play in fighting it.

The event brought together EESC members and Austrian representatives of civil society organisations to discuss the main outcomes of the study Societies outside Metropolises: the role of civil society organisations in facing populism, commissioned by the Diversity Europe Group from the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS). At the heart of the debate was the rise of populism in four countries and comparisons between two regions with different levels of economic development in each country:
Austria: Klagenfurt-Villach and Niederösterreich-Süd;
France: Drôme and Aisne;
Italy: Udine and Reggio di Calabria;
Poland: Płocki and Nowosądecki.

“The EU must not only speak to people but actively listen and engage in dialogue”, said Arno Metzler, President of the Diversity Europe Group. “European civil society should help the Union to reach out to them. As members of the EESC, we have a double responsibility: we have to step up our activities linking the European and the national levels, and we have to work more closely together. Only by doing that can we help to reduce the misplaced fears that populists are so successfully manipulating”, he concluded. (cl)

Soon in the EESC/Cultural events

Reasserting Europe’s values

The role of civil society in protecting, promoting and reinforcing our heritage of values, looking towards the upcoming European elections

At its 12th Civil Society Media Seminar, which will be held in Athens from 22 to 23 November, the European Economic and Social Committee will look at European values as part of Europe’s heritage. On the eve of the European elections, three panels will be held to discuss the challenges and burning issues in contemporary Europe, such as multiculturalism, declining solidarity, growing nationalism and illiberalism, and the question of what civil society can do to protect a Europe which upholds its heritage of values - respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.

No better place could have been chosen for this seminar than Athens in Greece, where philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle taught philosophy, politics, ethics, aesthetics and much more.

Edvard Stepančič and constructivism across borders

In conjunction with the October plenary session, an exhibition of paintings entitled Edvard Stepančič and constructivism across borders will be presented in Foyer 6. The exhibition features a private collection of 21 original artworks and will be opened on Wednesday 17 October at 1 p.m. by EESC President Luca Jahier.

This month’s cultural event is organised in cooperation with the “Giuliani nel Mondo” cultural association and with the support of the Brussels Liaison Office of the Autonomous Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The exhibition will provide an introduction to the emblematic artistic career of Edvard Stepančič, a leading exponent of the constructivist art movement. (ck)

Food for Thought

In November the EESC will be hosting an exhibition entitled Food for Thought featuring 25 oil on canvas paintings by renowned artist Bruce Thurman. Presented in the guise of an illustrated cookbook, it is a voyage through the different recipes of Europe showcasing different food cultures.

The opening will take place in conjunction with the meeting of the Permanent Study Group on Food Sustainability Systems on 28 November. The exhibition will be open until 7 December. (ck)