



EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil Society

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Editorial



Better the balance, better the EU

Dear Readers,

In recent years, many European countries have celebrated the centenary of women gaining the vote, or will shortly do so. This victory was the fruit of long, hard, and sometimes bloody battles fought by the generations of women who came before us. How better to mark this turning-point in the history of our societies than for all women to exercise this right together?

The European elections will soon give us the opportunity. The EESC is committed to supporting the European Parliament's efforts to encourage strong civic participation in the upcoming European elections. In the same spirit, and as we head towards International Women's Day 2019, I would like to use this column to stress the importance of a huge turn-out by European women in these elections.

The EU has given rise to a range of [laws and measures](#) that have helped consolidate women's rights, tackle discrimination and violence against women and promote gender equality - and these measures have the complete backing of the EESC. What is more, the EU has made it a key criterion for accession that countries hoping to join the Union should take these achievements on board. The [fears concerning a weakening of these rights voiced in the United Kingdom](#) during a debate on Brexit serve to illustrate the protecting role the EU is seen to play in this area.

In fact, much remains to be done in most of our Member States to make equality in law equality in reality. To close the flagrant and persistent pay gaps ([16% on average across the EU in 2016](#)) that fly in the face of all the theoretical rules. To create real equal opportunities. To prevent and prosecute violence against women everywhere in Europe. It is not enough for the EU "to do things for women": women must also "do things in the EU".

The gender imbalance can be found not only in boardrooms or in the STEM sectors (science, technology, engineering and maths), [where it has barely shifted for more than a decade](#). It is also alive and well in official bodies, including the EU institutions. While [37.4% of Members of the European Parliament are women](#), the same cannot be said of the Commission ([9 Commissioners out of 28](#)), or the Court of Justice ([5 of 28 judges](#)), not to mention the Council, the membership of which depends more directly on the Member States. Even at the EESC, although its two vice-presidents are women, only 27.6% of members are women.

So, women must be actively involved in the election campaign - as both candidates and electors - to ensure meaningful representation in the Union's institutions and help create a more balanced Europe. To paraphrase [one of the major themes of the upcoming International Women's Day 2019](#), *Better the balance, better the EU*.

Isabel Caño

Vice-president for communication

Diary Dates

06-07/03/2019, Brussels

[2019 Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference: Success Stories and New Challenges](#)

15/03/2019, Brussels

[European Consumer Day 2019](#)

20- 21/ 03/2019, Brussels

[EESC plenary session](#)

21- 22/ 03/2019, Brussels

[#YEYSturns10: Vote for the future!](#)

In short

["Civil society for rEUnaissance" - What Europe do we want after the European elections?](#)



At the invitation of **Luca Jahier**, EESC president, the *Civil society for rEUnaissance* event will take place on 21 February. The discussions will enable organised civil society to speak out and the EU institutions to voice their hopes and expectations and to share their vision of Europe for the period following the European elections.

EESC members will take part in this meeting, which will be an opportunity to discuss the future of Europe. Two young activists will be attending: Swedish **Greta Thunberg** who is known for her environmental activism and motto "*Skip school for the climate*", and British **Madeleine Kay**, known as *EU Supergirl*, who is resolutely opposed to Brexit.

There will be two sessions: in the morning (9 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.), the presidents of the EU institutions - **Jean-Claude Juncker** (European Commission), **Antonio Tajani** (European Parliament) and **Karl-Heinz Lambertz** (Committee of the Regions) - will hold a debate with participants. They will be talking with the leaders of European organisations and movements such as **Business Europe**, the European Trade Union Confederation (**ETUC**), **Europa Nostra** and **CIVICO**. The presidents of the economic and social councils of Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Malta will contribute to the debate on the future of Europe.

The afternoon session will involve seven workshops on issues such as good conditions for businesses, sustainable development, education, fundamental rights and European values, the future of the labour market, culture and peace. The conclusions will feed into the EESC's opinions on the Europe of the future, just before the European elections.

[A webpage](#) has been set up for the event, with the hashtag **#EUCivilSociety**.

21 February 2019, 9 a.m. - 12.30 p.m., in the Charlemagne building, 170 rue de la Loi/Wetstraat

2.30 p.m. - 6 p.m. at the EESC, Jacques Delors building, 99 rue Belliard/Belliardstraat (ehp)

[Students across Europe welcome EESC members in preparation for Your Europe, Your Say!](#)



Members of the European Economic and Social Committee are visiting [thirty-three schools](#) throughout February to prepare them for *Your Europe, Your Say*, the youth assembly that is now in its tenth year and is taking place in Brussels under the slogan "**#YEYSturns10: Vote for the future!**"

The 16 to 18 year-old students will come to **Brussels on 21 and 22 March** to discuss their views, hopes and expectations about the forthcoming European elections as part of the **#YEYSturns10 plenary**. The participants will vote on three proposals for the European Parliament to take on board in [its campaign for the European elections](#).

Furthermore, the final report produced by YEYS will be viewed by the European Parliament as a statement on the part of young Europeans about "what kind of Europe they want to live in".

The 33 participating schools were selected from among a record 1038 applications using an electronic name picker. One school from each of the 28 EU Member States and five candidate countries (Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey) will be involved.

The event is called *Your Europe, Your Say!* (YEYS), and is being organised by the European Economic and Social Committee, the voice of civil society at European level. It is the Committee's flagship event for young people.

Further details about YEYS2019 are available on the website, and you can watch the YEYS 2018 video [here](#). (ks/dgf)

Michel Barnier at the EESC: "The worst thing for Europe is silence"



The EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, attended the European Economic and Social Committee's 540th plenary session to outline the EU's views on the Brexit deal and possible future scenarios.

EESC president Luca Jahier congratulated Mr Barnier for the work done and underlined that the EESC was strongly committed to UK civil society: *"The EESC is well prepared for any future scenario and will consolidate its relationship with our British counterparts."*

Mr Barnier warned that Europe needed to be prepared for a 'no-deal' scenario. *"Whatever the outcome, the representatives of organised civil society will have a decisive role in raising awareness among citizens"*, he said.

The 'backstop'

EESC members called for a firm stance on the 'backstop', which some referred to as the second-best solution for Northern Ireland, while the first was to remain in the EU.

Mr Barnier stressed that it was his responsibility to solve the problems for the EU. *"We don't want to use the backstop. It's comparable to your house insurance – you pay it but you hope not to have to use it."* It was the UK that wanted to leave the Union and it was Brexit that was causing problems for Ireland and Northern Ireland. The backstop was about people who needed security. And finally, the border in Ireland was also the border of 27 countries and the border of the Single Market. **Therefore it was a European question.**

"Brexit has no added value", Mr Barnier concluded. *"But we should not confuse the consequences with the lessons of Brexit. Neither should we confuse populism and popular feelings. The worst thing is silence. We need to speak out; we need to open the debate. We may have different opinions, but we must keep talking, because populists use silence against Europe."* (sma)

No-deal Brexit threatens viability of aeronautics and chemical industries in both UK and EU



At a high level discussion on Brexit's impact on the aeronautics and chemical industries, organised by the Consultative Commission for Industrial Change (CCMI) at the EESC, speakers agreed that the UK should stay aligned with EU laws, and that for chemicals, the REACH regulation was key. As for the aeronautics industry, agreements on reciprocity in the most important areas should be put in place and the planned transition period be extended to at least five years.

"It is crucial to find reciprocity solutions for the main sectors" warned Jan Pie, secretary-general of the AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD), who called for a longer transition period. The impact of a no deal would for the most part fall on the supply chain because just-in-time delivery needed a smooth supply chain. Components often had to

cross the Channel several times before the product was finally assembled. A blockage involving just one item could bring the whole supply chain to a halt. The same also applied to the movement of workers: the specialists who needed to move quickly between Britain and the EU. **The major concern for enterprises was divergence between EU and UK regulation.**

A Brexit deal was also indispensable for the chemical industry, underlined Ian Cranshaw, head of international trade at the Chemical Industries Association (CIA). With a turnover of GBP 18 billion, plus 150 000 direct and 500 000 indirect jobs, the chemical industry was of crucial importance to the UK. What the industry needed most was certainty. Mr Cranshaw's organisation had conducted a survey of the companies it represented and **not a single company had come back saying that Brexit would benefit them.**

"The lesson we might draw from this situation is to better communicate the achievements of the Single Market and the many advantages – for both industry and the citizens – that come with EU membership," CCMI president [Lucie Studničná](#) concluded.

The question as to who would benefit from Brexit at the end of the day remained unanswered. (sma)

EESC to call for legal recognition of philanthropic activities in EU



Contributions from philanthropic sources in Europe amount to almost EUR 90 billion annually, but unlike commercial companies, philanthropic foundations or private donors cannot enjoy the benefits of the European single market, making it difficult for them to extend their charitable work across borders.

Yet philanthropic activities in Europe have gained in importance and could be used to complement funding in many areas where public support is lacking, it was revealed at the hearing [European Philanthropy: an untapped potential](#), held by the EESC on 16 January.

The hearing brought together a number of philanthropic organisations and individuals, whose views will provide valuable input into an opinion on European philanthropy being drawn up by the EESC at the request of the Romanian Presidency of the EU.

"We will be calling for a legal framework to cover the development of philanthropic activities and to give philanthropic organisations the same status as that enjoyed by commercial companies," said [Petru Dandea](#), rapporteur for the opinion.

There are almost 150 000 public benefit foundations in Europe with a financial commitment of EUR 87 billion, which is more than the revenue budget of as many as 15 Member States.

The EESC will also argue that philanthropic activities should be transparent and clearly defined and that philanthropy should by no means replace public welfare systems or facilitate tax evasion. (II)

[EESC pushes for reform of WTO in line with EU values](#)



At its plenary session on 24 January, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted an [opinion](#) calling for ambitious reform of the World Trade Organization in order to overcome the current crisis while highlighting EU values and the EU's leading role in sustainability.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the global organisation dealing with the rules of trade between nations, but recent developments in international trade have made its work difficult. As [Emmanuelle Butaud-Stubbs](#), rapporteur for the EESC opinion, pointed out, the proposed reforms have to be *"in line with the values of the EU and with the role it can play in the world trade arena, and link investment to development"*.

The opinion includes proposals to keep the Appellate Body of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body up and running by extending the current judges' term of office as a temporary remedy to the present situation, increasing the number of judges from seven to nine and making provision for recruiting full-time independent judges.

Karl Brauner, WTO Deputy Director-General, took part in the debate at the EESC plenary session and confirmed the importance of keeping the Appellate Body operational: *"If it does come to a halt, the rules of international trade would no longer be enforceable. The rule of law would be replaced by the deal of the day and power would prevail over legality"*.

The EESC also suggests additional action on data protection, food safety standards and animal welfare and environmental standards in agricultural production. Furthermore, the opinion advocates greater civil society participation in the work of the WTO, for example using the WTO Public Forum, in the form of a balanced and representative assembly of social and economic stakeholders from all different sectors and interests. (dgf)

[Civil society wants to monitor EU free trade agreements more closely](#)



The EESC adopted at its January plenary session an opinion on strengthening the role of Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) in monitoring the implementation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) signed by the European Union. DAGs are already responsible for supervising the implementation of FTAs in the areas of sustainable development and labour standards, but the EESC wants to extend this monitoring role to all aspects of the agreements, including the core trade provisions.

The EESC believes that the participation of civil society in agreements of all types is essential, not only for monitoring purposes, but also to achieve their strategic aspirations.

This must be done through a single civil society participation body which comprises both sides of the agreement. [Alberto Mazzola](#), rapporteur of the opinion, pointed out that *"the EU today faces an increasing demand for constructive dialogue with civil society on trade, as seen with CETA and TTIP, and DAGs are a great way to connect citizens with trade issues"*.

This enhanced role of DAGs should be accompanied by other provisions concerning the functioning of current and future DAGs. DAGs should also guarantee a balanced representation of civil society interests and be able to involve and consult external stakeholders.

Currently there are eight active DAGs with 27 members of the EESC, five more are expected to be set up by 2021 and more may follow in the future. The EESC expects the cost of its involvement in DAGs to double over the next three years and to triple to cover the FTAs currently being negotiated. (dgf)

[EESC debate with Romanian presidency: time to reconnect people with Europe](#)



The EESC's January plenary session hosted a debate with Romania's Prime Minister, Vasilica-Viorica Dăncilă, on the priorities of the Romanian EU presidency for the first semester of 2019. EESC President Luca Jahier underlined how important it was, on the eve of the EU elections, to restore the trust of the European people in politics.

The EU integration process needs to be better understood, owned and supported by those who matter most, the people of Europe. *"The Future of Europe will be discussed at the Sibiu Summit on a symbolic date: 9 May 2019, Europe Day. This is the last moment, before the elections, to show a united, strong Europe, that is close to all its citizens and is determined to take bold action for them"*, said **Mr Jahier**. *"We need not only more effective EU policies, but also a new, positive narrative to reconnect citizens with the European project and restore their trust in politics, strengthening cohesion and countering populist tendencies"*, he added.

Ms Dăncilă expressed her determination to make significant progress on the most pressing issues the Union is facing with a view to bolstering unity, cohesion, solidarity and equity. She also reaffirmed the strong commitment of her country's EU presidency to European values and to listening to the voice of the European people about the direction the Union should follow. *"This is a priority for*

the Romanian Presidency. We will put forward solutions and take decisions that are as close as possible to the citizens and the realities of our societies. Only by constantly involving citizens will we be able to keep Europe strong and cohesive," she said. **Cohesion, a common European value** is indeed the motto of the presidency. (mp)

Cognitive minorities could help solve skills mismatch in tomorrow's labour market



Back in January, the EESC's TEN section enjoyed a presentation on how to tap into the potential of "cognitive minorities" - people with high-functioning autism, hyperactivity, dyslexia and dyspraxia - to meet the demand for technical skills which are in short supply, thereby also helping them integrate socially.

Hugo Horiot, author of the book *Autisme, j'accuse!* and himself autistic, pointed to the "many niche areas where certain highly technical skills are necessary but very hard to find, because the system rejects the cognitive group that provides those skills," stressing that "we need to encourage business and institutions to set other recruitment and evaluation methods than the standard models based on social skills."

According to a number of estimates, approximately 65% of today's school pupils will be called upon to perform jobs that do not currently exist and companies will find it increasingly difficult to find the skills they need. Tapping into the potential of cognitive minorities would not only provide a vital contribution to our society, but also offer an opportunity for social integration for people who have a different kind of intelligence. "A group in society that is deprived of any prospects would be offered the opportunity to contribute to our society in innovative ways," said **Mr Horiot**.

Recognising that all human beings are complementary and can contribute to society in multiple ways is fundamental. "We are all different from each other," said TEN section president **Pierre Jean Coulon**. "However, there are differences that are considered to be acceptable because they do not bother and affect anyone and, on the other hand, there are differences that we do not accept. Such is the case of neurodiversity," he concluded. (mp)

EESC backs creation of European centre for cybersecurity



The EESC supports the Commission's initiative to create a European industrial, technological and research competence centre for cybersecurity and a network of national coordination centres. The objective is to help the Union develop technological and industrial cybersecurity capacities and increase the competitiveness of the Union's cybersecurity industry.

In an [opinion](#) adopted at the January plenary session and put together by **Antonio Longo** and **Alberto Mazzola**, the EESC underlines that the Commission's proposal is an important step towards developing an industrial strategy for cybersecurity and a strategic move to achieve robust and comprehensive digital autonomy. These aspects are essential for

strengthening Europe's defence mechanisms against the ongoing cyberwarfare that threatens to undermine political, economic and social systems.

"Our society as a whole is affected. In just ten years, we have seen an exponential increase in cyberattacks around the world from 800 000 to 8 million," highlighted **Mr Longo**. "We support the Commission's initiative aimed at setting up a centre of competence to coordinate the national centres and to act as a reference point for the cybersecurity community," he said.

A public-private partnership on cybersecurity is a cornerstone of the strategy. "We are in favour of extending the partnership to include industry, on the basis of firm commitments on the scientific and investment fronts. We advocate a tripartite approach involving the European Commission, Member States and companies," added **Mr Mazzola**. "We also have to leave the door open to non-EU businesses which are willing to meet the EU's conditions to take part," he concluded. (mp)

Building resilience must be a top priority for the euro area in 2019



In 2019 it will be of the utmost importance for the euro area economies to build up economic and labour market resilience, taking into account the current economic outlook, says the EESC in its opinion on the Commission's 2019 economic policy recommendations for the euro area.

Building resilience is necessary to ensure that Member States are able to weather future shocks with limited economic and social costs says EESC rapporteur **Javier Doz Orrit**. To this end the **EMU must be deepened** by completing the Banking Union, increasing the EU's own resources and establishing a macroeconomic stabilisation function for the euro area, as well as properly implementing the **Social Pillar**.

The [EESC opinion](#) also calls for effective measures to reduce excessive surpluses, significantly increasing public investment and wages in countries with surpluses. In the medium term, the growth of real wages should be in line with real productivity growth and inflation.

Urging Member States with a large public debt and negative or zero output gaps to build **fiscal buffers** by means of contractionary fiscal stances would not be advisable. This would be likely to perpetuate low growth in those countries, without helping reduce their public debt as a share of GDP.

The EESC also draws attention to the urgent need for guidelines and measures to **encourage public investment and facilitate private investment**. When applying the EU's fiscal rules the so-called Golden Rule should be considered.

Policy changes should not be carried out at the expense of revenue for financing social investment and social protection systems, or at the risk of lowering social and labour rights. Upward convergence in economic and social standards should be pursued in parallel.

Finally, the EESC urges Member States to show the necessary commitment to swiftly overcome the remaining disagreements on these issues. (jk)

Despite great potential, success of proposed VAT reform cannot be taken for granted



A new VAT system for taxing trade between Member States must realise its full potential and limit any possible negative effects on the single market, says the EESC in its [opinion](#) on the Commission's proposal. Greater cooperation between authorities and extensive communication will be key to the successful implementation of the proposal.

The EESC considers the proposed reform to be a crucial step in completing the move to a definitive VAT system for taxing goods in B2B trade based on the destination principle. It believes that the new framework can bring tangible benefits to businesses.

"The reform can have a positive impact on businesses and their growth, but its success cannot be taken for granted", said rapporteur [Krister Andersson](#). *"Rules must be properly implemented, and national tax authorities must intensify their day-to-day collaboration while also engaging in a communication campaign,"* he explained.

While the reform will change the taxation of cross-border B2B trade in goods, services will continue to be taxed under a different regime. As this is likely to cause problems, the EESC calls for an exploration of how a system covering both areas can be rolled out as quickly as possible.

"A common way of taxing goods and services would be more conducive to growth and more effective against fraud" said co-rapporteur [Giuseppe Guerini](#).

In its opinion the EESC sets out practical recommendations on how the reform can be implemented and asks the Commission to clarify the proposed provisions for the One-Stop Shop (OSS) and the certified taxable person. It expresses concerns about the creation of new obstacles for SMEs and startups. Finally, the EESC recommends adequate investment in IT hardware and software assets to properly develop a solid and reliable OSS. (jk)

EESC hearing urges global solution for taxation in the digitalised economy



An effective world-wide solution for taxing businesses in the digitalised economy aimed at preventing further unilateral action and ensuring sustainable growth, investment, tax certainty and fairness, was called for by international tax experts and civil society representatives at a hearing held by the EESC on 29 January.

High-level speakers agreed that only a world-wide solution could be effective, both in terms of regulation and governance, and they welcomed the on-going debates taking place as part of the OECD Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS).

Participants discussed possible approaches to taxing businesses in the digitalised economy, currently being debated as part of this framework, including new systems for allocating international taxing rights (such as user participation, marketing intangibles and significant economic presence), and the ability of countries to exercise taxing rights in instances of

BEPS.

It was proposed that the possibility of addressing the tax issue within the Value Added Tax system should be fully explored and that a common definition for the concept of value creation was needed. In addition, it was decided that there was also a need to examine further whether an income tax solution focused on tax allocation of revenues would be preferable to a consumption tax solution.

Speakers urged that certain fundamental principles such as avoidance of double taxation, simplicity, certainty and equality be adhered to when designing new rules. A simplified methodology will be critical for the various parties involved and fair and efficient dispute resolution mechanisms must be developed and implemented. They also recommended further economic analysis of the impact of the BEPS project and the potential impact of any future measures that might be implemented.

The findings of the hearing will inform an [own-initiative opinion](#) drawn up by rapporteur [Krister Andersson](#), which is expected to be adopted by the July plenary. (jk)

Creative Europe 2021-2027: EESC calls for budget increase and special promotion under Horizon 2020

The creative sector in Europe has great potential, but needs more support to fully develop and become a serious competitive player on the world market. Other branches, including the textile, tourism, automotive, construction and health industries, would also benefit from an ambitious cultural and creative sector.

"Given all the important stakes the sector stands for – maintaining our cultural heritage, promoting our values, revitalisation, innovation, entertainment, and sustainable jobs and growth – the proposed budget of EUR 1.85 billion is far too low", argues Ms [Butaud-Stubbs](#), rapporteur of the [EESC opinion](#) on the Commission proposal for the Creative Europe programme 2021-2027.

"The digital revolution offers new opportunities provided we invest time in education, software and equipment", adds co-rapporteur [Zbigniew Kotowski](#). The EESC is calling for a specific budget under the Horizon 2020 programme to tap into the huge innovation potential of the branches of the creative industry.



Other EESC proposals include:

- a clear EU strategy for the creative and cultural industries (CCIs) for both the single market and external policy to increase competitiveness;
- an independent quantitative and qualitative study on the effects of the major mergers in the US audio-visual sector on the European market;
- an **increase of EUR 80 million for the cross-sectoral strand** to help Creative Europe desks promote the programme in their country and **work for a free, diverse and pluralistic media landscape, quality journalism and media literacy.** (sma)

[Time to break the mourning silence on International Holocaust Remembrance Day](#)



by Luca Jahier

As we prepare to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day, we can hardly remain composed in our mourning. Rather than observe silence as the deepest mourning is solitary, we feel like shouting.

Why is anti-Semitism not dead, not in Europe and not even in the United States? Why in France last year was a Holocaust survivor stabbed and burned to death in her apartment? Why the year before was a retired kindergarten teacher, Sarah Halimi, murdered and subsequently thrown from her Paris balcony?

Paris. Toulouse. Malmo. Copenhagen. Berlin, Brussels. Our humanity stained by innocent blood. Something we thought unimaginable is haunting us once again.

Germany's Jews have been advised to stop wearing kippahs for fear of attacks. French Jewish schoolchildren have been warned not to attend a local school described as anti-Semitic. Add to this the desecration of cemeteries, the swastikas painted on synagogues and schools, Jews being called "apes and pigs" at anti-Israel rallies. Europe is showing its ugly, inhumane face again.

Centuries ago, Jews were persecuted as a religious minority. In the last century, Jews were seen as a threat to the state, hence the desire to exterminate them in the Holocaust. Today, Jews are targeted mainly because of events in the Middle East, although some anti-Semitic sentiments also revolve around denying the Holocaust.

Many Jews are starting to bear the brunt of an angry populace feeling frustrated, disenfranchised and powerless. The Jewish population in Europe is declining. According to EU data, it fell from around 1.12 million in 2009 to 1.08 million in 2017. France's Jewish population, the largest in the EU, declined from around 500 000 in 2002 to 456 000 in 2017. Jews are leaving because of hate crimes.

Almost a third of European Jews avoid attending events or visiting Jewish sites because they do not feel safe. Nine out of 10 European Jews believe anti-Semitism has increased over the past five years, according to a survey released by the European Commission last December.

According to 89 percent of the 16 300 respondents to this survey, conducted in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom – the 12 countries home to 96 percent of European Jews – anti-Semitism is worst and most problematic on the internet and social networks.

We cannot allow the ugliness to come back. We need to combat hate crimes and hostile, violent behaviour towards Jews and minorities. Any failure on the part of our EU Member States or the international community to act, and to act promptly, will risk a return to the atrocities of the past and the contamination of our societies.

As was widely reported, just three days before the murder of Pawel Adamowicz in Gdańsk, an anti-Semitic satire was broadcast on prime time TV. In the satire, the charity organisation that invited Mr Adamowicz to the event where he was killed was portrayed as being run by opaque forces.

Mr Adamowicz was a staunch defender of the rights of minorities at a time of rising levels of hate crime. He was also an ardent liberal critic of the ruling conservative party's anti-immigrant policies. His murder serves as a reminder that we must end hate speech if we wish to avoid falling prey to hate.

Remembering the victims of the Holocaust and the Nazi atrocities is even more important today. The Holocaust is a defining legacy of European history and remembering the Shoah is an important means of preventing anti-Semitism.

As stressed by some history scholars, the time has come for a critical European culture of remembrance rather than an individual national culture of remembrance. If we do not remember together as Europeans, we risk reliving the mistakes of the past.

The longer we wait to banish hate speech and the longer we delay coming to terms with our pasts, the harder it will be to construct a genuine new collective European memory and forge a new identity, based on diversity, a sense of common history, common belonging and finally a common destiny.

As Primo Levi, author of *If this is a man* and the posthumous essay *The black hole of Auschwitz* wrote in his last book: "It happened, it could still happen."

[Employers' projects for the Romanian Presidency](#)



by the EESC's Employers' group

Cohesion, a common European value – this is the slogan of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2019. The Employers' Group sees a number of synergies between the priorities of the Romanian Presidency and its own political goals. That is why the Group is planning a joint event during the presidency, focusing on entrepreneurship.

In April, the Employers' Group will be holding a high-level conference on the European entrepreneurship model, to take place in Bucharest under the patronage of the President of Romania in cooperation with the Romanian employers' organisation. The event will discuss the future of SME policy, including the need for a new vision and additional measures at both Member State and EU level to support entrepreneurship and SMEs. Employers believe that promoting entrepreneurship and SME competitiveness as a mature, proactive and effective policy can make Europe stronger and better able to handle the challenges it is currently facing. (lj)

[EESC's Workers' Group welcomes agreement on work-life balance](#)



by the EESC's Workers Group

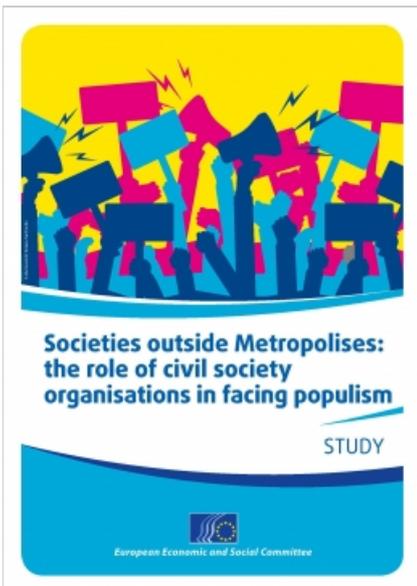
On 24 January the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Member States reached an [agreement on the work-life balance](#) directive. "This agreement is a concrete step towards making the lives of European working parents and carers easier," said [Gaby Bischoff](#), president of the Workers' Group at the EESC.

The Workers' Group led the discussions on strengthening the rights of workers with caring responsibilities within the EESC with [its opinion on the work-life balance of working parents and caregivers](#), seeing as trade unions had been pushing for this legislative initiative as an integral part of the European Social Pillar to bring social progress to European citizens.

*"We welcome the agreement as it will achieve progress by introducing 10 days' paternity leave around the time of birth. This leave is paid at the same level as sick leave for fathers or equivalent second partners, thus achieving the proposal's goal of increasing fathers'/partners' involvement. Mothers and fathers are entitled to parental leave, paid at an 'adequate' level. This was a key campaigning issue for trade unions in order to assist parents in achieving a better work-life balance. In addition, people caring for a sick relative will be able to take five days' carer's leave", said **Gaby Bischoff**.*

"Work-life balance policies are tools that will enable women and men to make choices starting from a level playing field," said [Erika Koller](#), the rapporteur for the opinion. "This agreement is not a silver bullet that will solve everything, but it is certainly a step in the right direction." (ppr)

[Societies Outside Metropolises: the role of civil society organisations in facing populism](#)



by the EESC's Diversity Europe Group

Populism in the EU is currently at its highest levels since the 1930s. In this context, the EESC's Diversity Europe Group has carried out a study on *Societies Outside Metropolises: the Role of Civil Society Organisations in Facing Populism*, which is now available [online](#).

The study identifies factors influencing citizens' choices in favour of populism and the role of civil society organisations in countering it. The study looks at 8 non-metropolitan areas with a high populist vote from four different countries, one above and one below the EU average in each case:

- **Klagenfurt-Villach and Niederösterreich-Süd (Austria)**
- **Drôme and Aisne (France)**
- **Udine and Reggio di Calabria (Italy)**
- **Płocki and Nowosądecki (Poland)**

Economic decline, social instability and limited levels of education are significant factors explaining the increased support for populists across the EU. However, there are other more important, interdependent factors. For example, real or perceived insecurities are fuelled daily by disinformation, while many young voters are attracted to the idea that populist parties can bring *positive change* to stagnant and incompetent political systems.

It is the strong view of the Diversity Europe Group that EESC members have a double responsibility: to step up activities at *both* the national and European levels to strengthen networks, explain 'Europe' better and bring it closer to members of the public. Ultimately,

protecting and preserving liberal democracy is everyone's business! (cl)

Soon in the EESC/Cultural events

[Culture events at the EESC: what's on](#)



The EESC organises cultural events to draw larger audiences into the debates that are at the heart of its work, to highlight the European dimension of an artist's work or to shine a light on lesser-known European artists worth discovering outside national borders. The 2019 programme has something for everyone.

Under the leadership of members [Martina Širhalová](#) (Employers), [Dirk Bergrath](#) (Workers) and [Indrė Vareikytė](#) (Diversity Europe) (*left to right in the photo*), who currently make up the Culture sub-committee, the EESC stages art exhibitions, concerts, film screenings, live performances and many other events.

Cultural events planned for the first six months of 2019 include the exhibition ["What's "old" anyway? Staying creative after retirement"](#); a live performance by Italian mezzo soprano Valentina Volpe, one of the most popular contenders in Europa Nostra's [#Ode2Joy Challenge](#) (21 February); a screening of *The man who mends women*, dedicated to 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege (6 March), combined with an open debate, and *Kindred Spirits*, an exhibition of photographs by Dutch recycling artist Suzanne Jongmans to be displayed in conjunction with the [Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference](#) (6-7 March).

Through these events, often developed in partnership with cultural organisations and other entities, the EESC wishes to highlight its political priorities and raise awareness about issues that impact European society.(ck/dm)

Editors:

Ewa Haczyk-Plumley (editor-in-chief)
Daniela Marangoni (dm)

Coordination:

Agata Berdys (ab)
Katerina Serifi (ks)

Contributors to Address: this issue:

Chrysanthi Kokkini (ck)
Chloé Lahousse (cl)
Daniela Marangoni (dm)
David Gippini Fournier (dgf)
Ewa Haczyk-Plumley (ehp)
Jasmin Kloetzing (jk)
Katerina Serifi (ks)
Laura Lui (ll)
Leszek Jarosz (lj)
Marco Pezzani (mp)
Pablo Ribera Paya (prp)
Silvia M. Aumair (sma)

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

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