Editorial

Luca Jahier: Europe - that's us!

Dear Readers,

The time is fast approaching when all our attention will turn to the results of the European elections.

26 May will be a crucial moment for Europe. Essential! That is the word to describe people's votes, including those of young people who will have understood that their future is at stake and who do not want someone else to decide for them what the future of Europe will be. Will turnout exceed the 42% registered in 2014? If so, it will mean that we will have understood what is at stake: the vitality of the European venture and its continuing power to attract.

This time, more than ever, Europe is at a crossroads, facing what could perhaps be the most important outcome of events in its history. These European Parliament elections represent the keystone of the future for all of us - for all Europeans.

In this situation, to remain silent, not to speak out, is equivalent to laying ourselves open to those who, fuelled by disinformation, are opting for the destruction of the European Union. Let's respond together to the dangers of populism, scepticism, alienation, rejection and doubt. It is when the people of Europe go to the polls that they rediscover the roots of democracy. We have no other solution than to vote. Those who are elected for a five-year mandate in the European Parliament will be keeping watch over this democracy, which is so dear to the great philosophers and thinkers.

For 61 years, Europe has been progressing step by step. Of course, it has known crises: in the euro zone, with migrants and Brexit and, most dangerous of all, in the trust that the public places in it. Yet despite these difficulties, it is capable of expanding and embarking on new projects. What aspects of Europe do people find attractive? It is the Europe which protects, which defends our values, which fights for the climate and which gives a decent welcome to migrants. Having gone through several crises, Europe keeps emerging from them stronger than before, like a phoenix rising from the ashes.

I call upon all EESC members - players in civil society - to be actively involved in mobilising people to participate in the electoral campaign, addressing all the relays of public opinion. All means of communication are valid: our opinions, our dialogue, conversations within our organisations, our presence in the regions and in our local areas, listening and talking to those who have doubts, who do not believe in the success of a strong, united and solidarity-based Union.

Let's be daring and say out loud: “Europe is our home!” We should not hesitate to show that we are passionate about this joint project. Let's resist resignation, ignorance and hate. The real danger comes from indifference. If we do not go and vote, someone else will decide for us.

So let's dare to be brave! Let's dare to speak up! Guided by wisdom and youthful energy, let's be incisive in response to our adversaries, with strong arguments in favour of a Europe which fires the imagination!

Luca Jahier,
EESC president
Diary Dates

4 May 2019, Brussels
Open Day of the European Institutions

9 May 2019 Sibiu, Romania
EESC President Luca Jahier participating in the international conference The Future of Europe, Perspectives of the Contemporary Developments

15-16 May 2019, Brussels
EESC plenary session

12-13 June 2019, Brussels
Civil Society Days 2019 - Sustainable Democracy in Europe

In short

European Citizens' Initiative Day opens a new chapter in EU citizen participation

"The Commission has the moral obligation to react to ECIs," said First Vice-President Frans Timmermans.

Christophe Lefevre, EESC member and president of the ECI ad-hoc group, opened the 8th European Citizens' Initiative Day on 2 April.

Laura Sullivan, founder of WeMove.EU, who delivered the keynote speech, said that digital activism could mobilise larger groups. It would also help to show evidence of what we share and our common cause, and help to build more solidarity and engagement across Europe. "We have more in common than we are often aware of," she stated.

First Vice-President Frans Timmermans presented the new rules for European Citizens' Initiatives. In his speech, the Commissioner raised the political dimension of the ECI: "There is no obligation to give the promoters of an ECI what they want. In my view, however, there is a moral and political obligation for the Commission to react and engage in political debate. People expect us to be clear about what should be done and what cannot be done."

The challenge for the next European Commission was to assess how digitalisation and democracy work together in an effective way, including by reinventing democracy as we know it and adapting it to the kind of world in which people now live.

"Digital Voices" was the theme of the 2019 ECI Day. Digital natives no longer wait for elections to express their preferences; they voice their concerns all the time and at every opportunity.

"Denying what is voiced in the digital world would be ignorant and even stupid," said Christophe Lefevre. "But EU institutions and governments must be wise about how to adapt to this trend and have a particular responsibility regarding correct information and upholding ethical principles and respect." (sma)

"We are all migrants"

On 2 April, EESC President Luca Jahier, accompanied by EESC Members Isabel Cano, Stefano Mallia and Cristian Pirvulescu, visited the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp - a symbolic place for European migration. Two million passengers travelled from Antwerp, the Red Star Line's main European port, to North America on board its ships.

The museum focuses on their stories. According to President Luca Jahier the issue of migration is still a key topic for Europe, it is not a new one on which we have only become divided in recent years, but it is a part of the history of Europe, and the link is absolutely clear. For millions of migrants the first reason for leaving their countries was security - because people who were persecuted dreamt of a life where they could live freely. The second reason was economic - they wanted a better life. And the third reason was love - the dream of a happy life with the partner they had found. During their visit, the EESC Delegation met a group of migrants from Syria, Armenia, Iran and Congo who were helped by the...
Community of Sant'Egidio. They spoke about their fate, about the situation of newly arrived migrants and refugees in Belgium, but also about their hope for a better life. (ehp)

EESC and French Economic, Social and Environmental Council together for broad participation in the European elections

"We must reinvent Europe with enthusiasm and projects that are close to the people", said Presidents Patrick Bernasconi and Luca Jahier at the EESC March plenary session.

"We must join forces for the future of Europe and we need to mobilise civil society at all levels, in view of the European elections. They demand, more than ever, our vigilance and commitment.”

Pointing out that cooperation between all institutions was key, Mr Jahier reiterated the unflinching support of European civil society for the European project, its values and its achievements.

Mr Bernasconi was on the same page, echoing the words of the EESC president and underlining that the Committees must serve as an intermediary between society and political power. Highlighting his vision of the role of civil society on the eve of the European elections, he maintained that it was essential to regain lost ground and to stand shoulder to shoulder. (mp)

EESC News

Millions of citizens with disabilities will not be able to cast their ballots in European elections

Some 800 000 EU citizens suffering from mental health problems or who have an intellectual disability will be deprived of their right to vote on account of national rules that are in force in 16 Member States. On top of this, millions of voters will be deterred by technical barriers at polling stations that do not take into account the needs resulting from their various types of disability, the EESC said in a report.

The EESC’s information report Real rights of persons with disabilities to vote in EP elections issued in March, has shown that despite many binding legal documents protecting the rights of these people in the EU, not a single Member State has so far ensured that elections are accessible to all.

“This report presents an ugly side of Europe – a reality which is far from our expectations,” said its author, Krzysztof Pater, who compiled it on the basis of surveys conducted over two years in all EU countries except the UK.

In nine countries, persons with mental health problems automatically lose their voting rights when they have a guardian appointed. Under seven national laws, their ability to vote is individually assessed by either courts or medical boards.

In as many as 18 Member States, blind voters have no way of voting independently.

In eight countries, anyone physically unable to come to the polling station will not be able to cast their ballots.

However, the report does give reason for hope, as it lists 200 examples of good practices and positive solutions from all EU countries. (II)

“Still a lot to do to ensure that citizens with disabilities in Europe are able to vote”

EESC Info interviewed EESC member Krzysztof Pater, to hear the story behind his report Real rights of persons with disabilities to vote in EP elections.

EESC Info: What inspired you to start working on this report?
**What do you hope to achieve through this report? Have you received any feedback?**

This report shows a sad reality. For many people it confirms what people have been saying for years. But at the same time, it is a huge collection of positive examples. For organisations working in Member States for the rights of people with disabilities or, more broadly, on human rights, it is a unique instruction manual that shows the potential direction of developments in specific Member States. The decision of the German Constitutional Court enabling people with intellectual disabilities to vote in the 2019 European Parliament elections, which was taken a month after the EESC report was adopted, is another example of breaking down existing barriers.

The report was also sent to many institutions responsible for running elections in Member States. It should enable them to compare the level of adaptation of arrangements to the needs of people with disabilities with arrangements made in other countries and undertake essential legislative initiatives.

**So, in the next European Parliament elections in 2024 will the majority of voters with disabilities be able to vote?**

There are two ways to change existing conditions. The first is changing the rules governing elections to the European Parliament. Since the EU requires that citizens living in another Member State have the right to vote in European elections, it is also possible to adopt legislation to guarantee the right to vote for all people with disabilities starting from the 2024 elections. If such measures are adopted, then we can expect similar changes in national or local elections to be independently implemented by Member States. The second, and slower, way is legislative changes at Member State level. In this way it is also possible to significantly improve the exercise of voting rights by people with disabilities at the next European Parliament elections.

**EESC puts forward blueprint for Future of Europe**

The EU must get closer to its citizens and become the global leader in sustainable development, argues the EESC in a bold opinion on the future of the EU. The Committee calls for a new EU strategy which takes a holistic and cross-sectoral approach centred around Europeans' needs and sustainability and it puts forward policy recommendations covering eleven priorities. A new overarching strategy to implement the 2030 Agenda must be backed up by an ambitious EU budget.

The EESC’s policy recommendations relate to eleven priorities, including a governance priority. Under this priority the EESC recommends that all internal and external EU policies should be coherent and in line with the SDGs, allowing for the principles of efficiency and proportionality.

Under the priority “people’s Europe”, the EESC advocates pursuing measures to further enhance civic participation in EU policy-making in order to regain people’s support for and faith in the process of EU integration.

Enhanced communication on EU policies should be another priority for the new strategy. Substantial, credible and lively information could help, amongst other things, raise citizens’ awareness about the EU’s achievements and the value of common action.

According to the policy recommendations under the sustainable development priority, the future strategy should deliver on the EU’s international commitments on climate, biodiversity and water. This means that it must at least ensure full and immediate implementation of the Paris Agreement and speed up the fair and sustainable transition to a high level of renewable energy supply.

The eleven priorities also include a strong social dimension, which should enhance convergence within the EU, for instance by improving and increasing investment in education systems across the board. The development of a common, comprehensive and balanced approach to migration policy should be another objective.

Finally, European business must become a stronger sustainable global player. Sustainable businesses would cope successfully with the digital transformation and remain drivers of innovation and creativity. A sustainable economy involves free and fair trade, specific rules for public goods and services and fair taxation.
**EESC calls for action to uphold democracy amid alarming reports from EU civil society**

The European Economic and Social Committee has taken a strong stance against increasing attempts to undermine the functioning of Europe's democratic civil society organisations and is calling on the EU to use every tool enshrined in the EU Treaty against Member States which succumb to authoritarianism.

The EESC also stressed that “parties which turn against democracy should be excluded from their political group in the European Parliament.”

In its recent opinion Resilient democracy through a strong and diverse civil society, it warned that a number of political forces were now working against liberal democracy in Europe, with the ultimate goal of destroying the EU. Although mainly belonging to rightwing extremist movements and parties, in some Member States these groups are already in the government.

This has taken its toll on civil liberties and open civil society, which are now being challenged in many ways across the EU, said the rapporteur Christian Moos.

The EESC called on the EU to establish a Democracy Semester and a European control mechanism on the rule of law and fundamental rights, together with a Democracy Scoreboard.

It asked the Member States to introduce tax incentives and said it was in favour of coercive economic measures for failure to uphold EU values, although emphasising that these cuts must not hurt civil society organisations and the people these organisations help. (Il)

**EESC plenary hosts promoters of European Citizens' Initiative "Stop Extremism"**

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) welcomed Sebastian Reimer and Michael Laubsch, two of the initiators and promoters of the “Stop Extremism” European Citizens’ Initiative, which has gathered around 1.6 million signatures, to be validated by the Member States.

In his introductory remarks, EESC president Luca Jahier reaffirmed the EESC’s continuous commitment – something that emerged in a very practical way at the annual ECI day (see article below) – to improving the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) instrument, making it more user-friendly and ensuring that it had a genuine impact. These efforts were finally bearing fruit.

Mr Laubsch said that with the Stop Extremism ECI, the initiators wanted to rouse people from their “EU fatigue” and bring together EU politics, the EU institutions and the people of Europe to discuss how to fight extremism. “Hate is starting to disrupt our society. Our fundamental rights need renewed support, especially from the public”.

“It is not enough to counter extremism, we need to prevent it. This starts in schools, by empowering young people to be resilient when confronted with extremist discourse, especially on online social platforms. We must also address the socioeconomic problems that lead to exclusion and alienation”, said Oliver Röpke, president of the EESC’s Workers’ Group.

A similar line was adopted by Gonçalo Lobo Xavier (Employers’ Group): “We need to protect the European model. Freedom is an inalienable right, one which we dearly embrace. It is not only about imposing laws, but we must respect everybody's choices and everybody's freedom within the framework of our fundamental rights and values”.

Finally, Cillian Lohan (Diversity Europe Group) said: “It is important to look at the causes of extremism and the rise of populism in the EU. The reality people are feeling is quite different from the views of those in power, and this creates a complete disconnection between those in power, governments and the citizens on the ground”. (sma)

**The EESC proposes a plan to make EU the peace-building leader both in Europe and globally**

In its March plenary session the EESC adopted an opinion outlining an EU-led global peace-building strategy which includes the creation of the WhiteDoveWay, a path of peace from Northern Ireland to Nicosia, to promote dialogue, reconciliation and conflict prevention.
The time has come for the EU, the greatest peace project in modern history, to become a global leader in peace-building in Europe and the world. This is the main message of the own-initiative opinion *The WhiteDoveWay – Proposal for an EU-led global peace-building strategy* adopted by the EESC. As stated by Jane Morrice, rapporteur of the opinion, "the EU has a moral obligation, above and beyond geopolitical or economic interests, to find ways to protect the lives of innocent victims caught up in conflict, particularly children".

The EESC urges the EU to create and finance a new Global Peace-building Strategy that would include as a main feature the creation of the WhiteDoveWay, a path of peace stretching 5 000 km across Europe, from Northern Ireland to Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. This route would follow in the footsteps of Columbanus, the sixth century Irish pilgrim who travelled from Ireland to Italy and was described by EU founding father, Robert Schuman, as "the patron saint of all those who seek to build a united Europe".

The initiative also includes the creation of European Centres for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and Nicosia and learning hubs connecting strategic sites along the WhiteDoveWay, as well as the recognition by the EU of the White Dove symbol as the "trade mark" for all EU peace projects. (dgf)

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**EU needs to define clear strategy on EU-Asia connectivity**

At its March plenary session, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted an opinion on the Joint Communication *Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy* issued by the European Commission and the EU High Representative in September 2018. The EESC considers it to be a seriously missed opportunity, with many significant strategic gaps, little ambition and no real depth of vision as to the development of EU relations and connectivity with Asia.

The EESC believes that key economic and geopolitical realities have not been reflected, with little overt recognition of the broad diversity or complexity of Asia. It points out "with deep concern" at least 17 areas where little if any reference is made to recent critically important developments affecting both the EU and Asia.

Among these gaps, the opinion points out that there is no mention of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a development strategy adopted by the Chinese government which is seen as a strong signal of China's desire to play a greater role globally and increasing its sphere of influence. The EESC believes that it is imperative that the EU make a formal response to the BRI.

The EESC also regrets that there is no reference to any of the existing civil society dialogue between EU and Asia in the Communication, especially
the flagship civil society monitoring bodies set up under these significant trade agreements. As mentioned by Jonathan Peel, the rapporteur for the opinion, no one size can fit all, and Asia can never mirror the EU. However, the rapporteur also says that “the EU needs to do more to win hearts and minds in Asia” and that the Communication has disappointingly little to say about human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democratisation. (dgf)

Endocrine disruptors: harmonised legislation will protect European citizens more effectively

Endocrine disruptors are substances of particular concern, and so coherent and harmonised EU legislation must tackle the ways in which they are used. The EESC calls for a consistent and holistic strategy that is based on scientific knowledge and includes an action plan with clear targets and deadlines.

The EESC considers it essential to carry out a complete fitness check on current legislation, including its social and economic impact, in order to establish the real state of play.

"Current legislation is fragmented and sometimes incoherent due to a lack of coordination. We need to create a legislative framework enabling us to deal with the use of EDs in a coherent, consistent and scientific way. The use of EDs must be based on the precautionary principle and thus in line with effective provisions that have already been adopted on biocides and pesticides," said Brian Curtis, rapporteur for the EESC opinion Towards a comprehensive EU framework on endocrine disruptors adopted in March. Furthermore, a long-term strategy should be reinforced with a realistic action plan in order to set targets and deadlines.

The Committee proposes establishing a financial mechanism to support both enterprises and workers during the transition period.

Civil society could play a crucial role in developing or supporting national awareness campaigns, by passing on information about EU measures to protect Europeans’ health along with education and training incentives. (sma)

EESC backs EU action plan on disinformation

The EESC threw its support behind the action plan on disinformation presented by the Commission and the EU High Representative. In an opinion by Ulrich Samm and Giulia Barbucci adopted at the March plenary session, the EESC points out that disinformation can be defined as verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, causing public harm and threatening democracy.

"Spreading disinformation has become a part of a hybrid war with a clear political aim," said Mr Samm. "In addition to false information, there are other threats to people's freedoms, fundamental rights and minority rights, including highly selective information, defamation, scare-mongering and inciting hatred."

The most effective disinformation always contains a grain of truth and for this reason it is very difficult to counter effectively. We need multiple forms of action by all stakeholders to provide good quality information and raise awareness. This is why we support the initiative for coordinated action to protect the EU, its institutions and its citizens against disinformation," emphasised Ms Barbucci. "We need to act now since the European elections of May 2019 are not far off."

Active participation by civil society organisations is key to offering a comprehensive response to disinformation. The EESC is proactively engaged in supporting joint efforts to tackle disinformation and takes action on a regular basis through its opinions and by organising hearings, local events and a number of other activities. (mp)

Cohesion policy must be integral part of new strategy for EU

The EU urgently needs a new, ambitious and clear strategy for its future in line with the UN 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and other international commitments. Cohesion policy must be an integral part of it. This new strategy would also provide a vision for future cohesion policy itself. New provisions for cohesion policy post-2020 must provide for sufficient resources and guarantee improved policy efficiency and visibility, urges the EESC in an exploratory opinion on the future of cohesion policy.

While the EESC's opinion urges that specific current challenges not be allowed to sink into oblivion, it emphasises the importance of developing a cohesion policy for the period 2021-2027. A future-proof policy should be open to all regions and provide the necessary tools to meet future challenges such as embracing new technologies, achieving a high level of competitiveness and managing the transition towards sustainable development whilst creating quality jobs.

A budget cut as proposed by the Commission is not acceptable to the EESC, as cohesion policy is one of the fundamental pillars for bringing the EU closer to its citizens and reducing disparities between EU regions and inequalities across society. In view of this, and with new challenges emerging, the budget should remain at least at the level of the previous period.

The opinion also emphasises that the impact of cohesion policy must be communicated more effectively. Current publicity obligations for funded
projects must thus be upgraded significantly so that the added value of EU integration generally and cohesion policy in particular becomes more visible to the public.

A strong territorial approach, more coherence and continuity between EU and national strategies, increased simplification and civil society involvement can, in the EESC’s view, all contribute to enhanced policy efficiency. (jk)

In the photo: general view of market square in Lubaczów (Poland), with recently renovated thanks to EU funds town hall buildings.

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**Europe’s Circular Economy "network of networks" rises to challenge of circular transition**

More than 350 circular economy stakeholders from across Europe shared their success stories and the challenges they face during the second day of the Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference, hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee on 7 March 2019.

EESC member Cillian Lohan called on participants to reflect on a key question for the development of the Circular Economy: Who is going to drive the change? Should it be consumers, business or policy makers: who should go first?

“I would argue that in making the initial change responsibility should not be put on the consumer,” said Lohan, who also stressed: “It is changes in business practices, supported by policy changes and policy infrastructure that will actually create the environment where consumers have the affordable and accessible options that will allow them to make circular, sustainable choices.”

Ladeja Godina Košir, chair of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, called on participants to make the most of the Platform as a support network to help solve the problems they encounter in their Circular Economy project. She had a clear message: “We want to be the network of networks for everyone.”

Joanna Drake, deputy director general, DG Environment, stressed the crucial role of stakeholder involvement in the European Commission’s Circular Economy initiatives, saying: “Part of their success is a focus on a bottom-up approach calling on support and engagement with stakeholders through cooperation, platforms, exchanges of best practices and voluntary business approaches.”

Discussions took place in eight interactive workshops focusing on the following topics:

- Mapping Circular Strategies in Europe
- Consumer Insights for the Circular Economy
- Social dimension of the Circular Economy
- Circular Cities for Climate Change Mitigation
- Circular Public Procurement
- Tools for Measuring the Circular Transition
- Creative Innovation for a Circular Economy
- Bio-Circular Villages for rural development

The day closed with the launch of the Kindred Spirits exhibition.

Participants were also inspired by an unconventional speech on suggestions for navigating what's next in the Circular Economy by Rieta Aliredjo, chair of the Stars-are-circular Foundation. Her message? Be curious, aware, generous and playful!

Reports with findings from each workshop are available here. (dm)

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**European Consumer Day 2019 focuses on European consumer policy for Europe's new generations**

Is consumer policy geared towards young people? How can we support them in making sustainable choices? How can we translate new trends into consumer policies? A lively debate held in Brussels on 27 March addressed these questions. A room full of students, consumer associations, business and representatives of the e-sector tackled issues ranging from improving mobility and avoiding food waste to making fast fashion sustainable and understanding the role of ICTs in driving change.

The main goal of the event was to address the new challenges linked to sustainability and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the strongest influences on young people today.

EESC vice-president Isabel Caño opened the 21st European Consumer Day by expressing her support for mass youth mobilisation for the climate and stressing the close link between consumption and the environment and the importance of having a consumer policy in tune with young people's climate ambitions.

"Your influence needs to become stronger and stronger in the political sphere. Young people should have an essential role to play in the drafting of current and future EU policy. With this European Consumer Day, we want to stress that it is paramount that your voice be heard in Brussels," she said.

Seventeen-year old Youna Marette, one of the figureheads of climate protests in Belgium, spoke for her generation: "Young people are..."
consumers. They are aware of the major issues involved. People say we are not, but that is not true," she said. "I was born in a system based on endless growth and profit. How can we exit this system without becoming marginalised? The answer is simple, I believe: everything has to change, and change is already underway."

The question of how the younger generation's consumption patterns differ from those of older consumers was a common theme throughout the day. Recent studies on consumer behaviour by the Commission and CREDOC illustrated new trends and challenges. If millennials are more aware of environmental issues than older generations, for whom sustainability was more of an abstract notion, they still choose price and convenience over product durability, though their limited purchasing power seems to be the reason for this.

Another study from CEPS showed that millennials spend their income differently. Communication is a major expense and is perceived as a basic need, much like food and housing. Ownership of smartphones for this generation is virtually 100%, and this has an impact on the way they consume, with online purchasing making up a large share.

To better understand the new challenges ahead for consumer policies, three parallel workshops investigated three key industries: food, mobility and clothing.

A debate on the influence of social media saw speakers agree that social networks are and will likely remain central to young people's lives. It was therefore vital to understand whether and how they should be regulated. ICTs can be double-edged: a powerful, democratic tool that can bring millions of people together - but also a way to acquire private data and induce people to consume more through targeted advertising.

A report setting out the main findings of the day is available here.

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**EU should act to strengthen single currency's international role**

Prerequisites for fully developing the potential of the euro as an international currency include sound macro-economic policies in the EU, deepening the EMU and completing the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union (CMU). However, what is needed above all is mutual trust and a shared vision among the Member States on the future of the EU economy. These are the main conclusions from a hearing on Strengthening the international role of the euro recently held by the EESC.

A stronger euro would translate into lower transaction costs and risks for European industry and consumers. Europe would strengthen its influence in the world and boost its sovereignty. In the view of the speakers at the hearing, another reason for further enhancing the euro's international role is that the world's leading currency at this time, the US dollar, has become more politicised over recent years. Against this background, the euro has the potential to help build a multipolar and more resilient international financial system.

The speakers generally welcomed the Commission's initiative to strengthen the euro, but were critical about its possible scope. The US dollar would be and remain strong in the markets, because of market depth and liquidity. At EU level, the CMU would have the potential to develop and integrate the market, which would be important for the international role of the euro.

Upward economic convergence, increased social cohesion, a more active European diplomacy in international fora and a common European vision on certain strategic issues were considered other vital conditions for a strong euro by speakers, just as an efficient response to industrial and climate change by the European financial system.

The hearing provided valuable input into the EESC's work on its opinion related to the European Commission's communication Towards a stronger international role of the euro. (jk)

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**European Migration Forum makes ten recommendations for improving EU migration policy**

On 3 and 4 April, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Commission held this year's European Migration Forum (EMF), which explored the role of civil society and local authorities in managing migration and ensuring safe and regular pathways to the EU.

The 2019 Forum - now in its fifth year - produced ten recommendations, which were the result of discussions between some 250 professionals from EU civil society organisations and representatives from local, regional and national authorities, European institutions and international organisations.

The event was opened by the Commissioner for Migration, Dimitris Avramopoulos, and EESC President, Luca Jahier, who both stressed the need for a smart and well-controlled EU policy on legal migration, which could in turn help the EU to harness the benefits of migration, promote social cohesion and protect the most vulnerable amongst the migrants.

The EMF pointed to the power of grassroots level in terms of making a difference in the successful management of migration and highlighted the pressing need to include migrants' views when developing integration policies.

Other proposals topping the list of the Forum's recommendations focused on the involvement of host societies in migrant inclusion projects, special needs of vulnerable groups, incentives for the reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin following a stay in the EU for work or study and other issues. (II)
European Employers call for an open, united and strong EU

By the EESC's Employers' Group

Less than two months before the European elections, the Employers’ Group calls for an open, united and strong EU. Business representatives are committed to working for a strong and prosperous EU. The strength of the EU lies in its attractiveness. To further benefit from this "European way of life", we need a competitive business environment. These are just some of the main messages emerging from the Political Declaration that the Employers' Group has recently adopted.

On 9 April, the President of the Group, Jacek Krawczyk, handed the declaration to the Vice-President of the European Commission, Jyrki Katainen. “We have issued this declaration in order to be vocal about employers' support for the EU. The benefits the EU brings are obvious for everyone doing business, but too often we forget about them in daily life. The employers want to change this”, stated President Krawczyk.

The declaration calls for an open economy – with open markets and fair competition. An open economy must be accompanied by an open society that relies on dialogue and good governance. Europe needs enabling and encouraging policies that stimulate creativity, innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit.

The employers are confident that openness increases stability and security, in both the economy and society. An open economy and society are beneficial for all. This is a way forward for generating new confidence in the EU.

The declaration is available in 23 official EU languages via the following link: bit.ly/2X6Swgu

Workers look into how best to fight social dumping while making most of mobility

by the EESC Workers' Group

The EESC Workers’ Group hosted Professor Roberto Pedersini from the University of Milan, who presented his study How to design the European Labour Authority (ELA) to fight more efficiently social and wage dumping. Oliver Röpke, President of the Workers’ Group, emphasised the important role social partners, and especially trade unions, have in ensuring the implementation of labour legislation.

The number of people living and working in a European Member State other than their home Member State has doubled over the past decade, reaching 17 million in 2017. In the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Commission announced the creation of a European Labour Authority (ELA), which will open in 2019. Professor Pedersini explained that the ELA’s “aim is to reduce fraudulent use of workers whilst taking full advantage of labour mobility.” It will mainly play an enabling role, supporting national labour authorities in their cross-border investigations and cooperation.

Carlos Trindade, member of the EESC Workers' Group and rapporteur of the EESC ELA opinion, quoted Commission President Juncker: "It seems absurd to have a Banking Authority to police banking standards, but no common Labour Authority for our Single Market." He also stressed the growth in xenophobia and nationalism resulting from years of social dumping and inequality, and called for a greater role for the social partners in the ELA’s governance.

Diversity Europe Group discusses civil society’s role in upholding Europe's shared values

By the EESC's Diversity Europe Group

On 7 May the EESC's Diversity Europe Group will hold its next extraordinary meeting in Bucharest. This high level conference will take place in the Atrium of the National Library, and its topic will be A Europe of Shared Values and Civil Society.

Only two days before the EU Summit in Sibiu on the Future of the EU, the conference will address three fundamental dimensions from the perspective of European civil society:

- Guaranteeing European values and fundamental rights
- The changing role of European civil society
- The future of the EU

Around 140 participants are expected, including EESC members from all EU Member States, as well as Romanian civil society organisations, representatives of academia, and representatives of the Presidency of the Romanian Council of the EU.

The Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU identified a ‘Europe of common values’ as one of its priorities. The Diversity Europe Group fully supports this objective, which complements the considerable work already carried out on this topic by our Group and the EESC at large.

Discussing how to protect democracy and its values, how to communicate and explain the benefits of EU membership and how civil society can...
shape the Europe of tomorrow is at the core of our activities. (ih)

Soon in the EESC/Cultural events

**EESC Open Day 2019**

The 9 May is Europe Day and, following an established tradition, the EU institutions will open their doors to the public on the first Saturday of the month, this year on 4 May. The theme will be the European elections of 23-26 May, which will call European citizens to the polls to choose their representatives for five crucial years.

As part of the European Parliament's [thisismeinvoting.eu](https://thisismeinvoting.eu) initiative, the EESC is campaigning for a higher voter turnout which can give more strength and legitimacy to the EU’s democratic process.

The day will be organised around three main themes **Sustainable Europe, Inclusive Europe** and **Open Europe**. The EESC will present its work in sectors as diverse as sustainable development, climate change, planned obsolescence, employment, disabilities, relations between the EU and the rest of the world.

EESC members and staff will welcome visitors and discuss with them the coming elections and the future of Europe as well as explain the role of the EESC in the EU decision-making process. Interactive games and fun activities coupled with live music will help make Europe more accessible to the general public.

EU Open Day 2019 – EESC - Jacques Delors Building, Rue Belliard 99, 1040 Brussels

**Sorin Onisor’s Romanian landscapes on display at the EESC**

The EESC will host the photography exhibition *Romanian landscapes of my heart* featuring the work of renowned Romanian photographer Sorin Onisor.

The exhibition will be displayed at the EESC from 23 April until 26 May 2019 in conjunction with the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

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