Dear Readers,

At the end of June, we said goodbye to the Romanian presidency of the Council of the European Union and, as always, a new semester means a new presidency. For the third time in its history, Finland takes on the rotating presidency, this time with the slogan ‘Sustainable Europe, Sustainable Future’. I am convinced: Finland will be working hard to make the EU’s global leadership in climate action a reality on the ground.

As you know, sustainability is one of the priorities of my mandate and today, quite frankly, we have no alternative other than to step up sustainability. The faster we move towards it, the sooner our society will be able to benefit.

I firmly believe that Agenda 2030 should become the driver in the EU decision-making process, the reference point for the years ahead. No action means dramatic consequences for all the citizens of the Union and this we simply cannot afford.

To be successful, we need to focus on the competitiveness of our industries, we need to invest in research and innovation and, most importantly, we need to be the first to move. But – let us not forget – the transition to a climate-neutral economy and society will not happen at zero cost.

This is why we have to make sure that nobody is left behind and that all businesses, workers, regions, local communities and citizens join forces and are stronger together in a new social pact.

Against this background, I can assure you that we will work hand in hand with the Finnish presidency and the dynamic civil society of Finland to achieve tangible results. There is no shortage of challenges on the economic, social and political level, including populism, Brexit and, of course, the fight against climate change.

As the young activists on the streets are reminding us every Friday, we cannot afford to waste any more time. We can still make a difference and Europe is at its best when it increases people's opportunities and reduces social inequality.

Now is the time for action. Now is the time for a sustainable Europe. Let's get to work.

Luca Jahier,
EESC President

Diary Dates

22 July 2019, Athens, Greece

EESC president, Luca Jahier, speaker at the Greek Economic and Social Council

23-24 July 2019, Riga, Latvia

Public hearing and fact-finding mission: Shaping the EU agenda for disability rights 2020-2030
EESC goes to Spain to assess impact of new economic models on Europe's single market

An EESC delegation recently met representatives of trade unions, NGOs and local government in Malaga, Spain, as part of a study on new economic models aimed at assessing their long-term impact on the EU's economic model.

An EESC delegation made up of Violeta JELIĆ (Employers), Franca SALIS-MADINIER (Workers) and Carlos TRIAS PINTO (Diversity Europe Group) met a variety of stakeholders at the "La Noria" Centre for Social Innovation on 14 June.

The meeting provided an institutionalised forum for stakeholders to share their experience and points of view and address the relationship between new economic models and consumption patterns, the labour market and sustainability.

This was the first of a series of seven missions to EU Member States by the EESC's Single Market Observatory (SMO), which is conducting the study, to engage in a dialogue with national stakeholders from the relevant private and public sectors.

A report will be issued early in 2020 making practical recommendations to the EU institutions, especially the European Commission and the European Parliament, on how to monitor the impact of new economic models on the EU Single Market in order to make it future-proof. (jpf)

Former President of EESC Workers' Group Gabriele Bischoff elected to European Parliament

Gabriele Bischoff, who until recently chaired the European Economic and Social Committee's Workers' Group, has been elected MEP in the S&D Group. She stood for election with the SPD party in Germany's Berlin constituency.

Ms Bischoff, who joined the EESC in 2009 in her capacity as a head of department at the German Confederation of Trade Unions DGB, was president of the Workers' Group from 2015 to 2019. (dm)

Dilyana Slavova takes part in a high-level meeting on EU support to Tunisia

Dilyana Slavova, president of the EESC's External Relations Section, took part in an international event hosted by the EESC on 3 July on "The social and solidarity economy in Tunisia: the role and support of the EU", with the participation of other high-level speakers including Samir Taieb, Minister of Agriculture of Tunisia, and Michael Koehler, Director of Neighbourhood South at the European Commission.

In her speech, Ms Slavova explained that Tunisia had always been "a key partner in the EuroMed region for the EESC", adding that "the Tunisian authorities and the EU are on the same page when it comes to involving civil society on issues such as agriculture, investment, trade and women's empowerment".

Concerning one of the key ongoing issues, the Post-Cotonou agreement and renegotiations, Ms Slavova stated that both EU civil society, represented by the EESC, and the Tunisian partners would like to see "an ambitious place" for civil society in the negotiations. (dgf)

EESC calls for socially fair energy transition and permanent dialogue with citizens

The EESC June plenary hosted a debate with commissioner Maroš Šefčovič on the future of Europe's Energy Union and set out its stance on the proposed EU strategy for the long-term reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

A transition to a decarbonised Europe should be socially fair and efficient, with all players joining forces and doing their share, the EESC agreed, stressing the need for action beyond 2030. "There is recognition across Europe that action on climate is urgently needed," said Mr Šefčovič, adding that the climate had become one of the central electoral topics in the EU and that "In Europe we
are finally looking at climate change as an opportunity to re-focus and re-organise our economy."

Mr Jahier was on the same page. He maintained that the goal of climate neutrality by 2050 was key to the future of Europe and wondered whether, despite much progress made in the fight against climate change, there would still be sufficiently ambitious policies and resources in place to underpin the long-term ambition of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

The EESC endorsed the proposed EU strategy for the reduction of long-term greenhouse gas emissions and its objective of making the European Union a climate-neutral economy by 2050. In an opinion drawn up by Pierre Jean Coulon and Stefan Back, the Committee calls for a permanent dialogue with citizens and a socially fair transition. Furthermore, it argues that a new social compact should be agreed.

"Such a transition is possible and beneficial for Europe, but everybody must be on board - we all need to join forces to achieve this common goal. We cannot separate citizens from decision-makers," said Mr Coulon.

Mobility is key: it is one of the areas where progress is most needed and can be made. "We need to find solutions to reduce the EU's CO2 footprint without having a negative impact on its entire economy and society," argued Mr Back. "We could design, adopt and implement a carbon pricing system that takes into account its effects on businesses and citizens and is fully accepted by them," he concluded. (mp)

Civil Society Days cautiously optimistic about sustainability of democracy in Europe

European citizens should be both vigilant and engaged, the Civil Society Days 2019 heard. The event, organised by the EESC's Liaison Group at the EESC on 12 and 13 June 2019, focused on Sustainable Democracy in Europe.

EESC president Luca Jahier said in his opening speech: "We need to address the climate crisis, the impact of which we are already feeling. We need to address the social crisis and contain inequality. Finally, we need to uphold our values and defend our multi-cultural, open democracy. Therefore, it is important to involve young people in what they are passionate and serious about, to drive a constructive revolution towards a new way of living."

Conny Reuter, co-chair of the Liaison Group, said that it was the responsibility of all democratic forces, including civil society, to strengthen civil and social dialogue.

Michael O'Flaherty, director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, described the EU as the most human rights-protected zone on earth, but saw five main challenges to be tackled as priorities:

- building an equal society in Europe;
- building a society that repudiates hate;
- building a society that celebrates diversity;
- building a society that respects the rule of law;
- building a society that works on the basis of partnership.

Concluding the event, Jeremy Wates, secretary general of the European Environmental Bureau, saw corruption and fake news as additional threats to Europe's democracy.

Proposals for a more sustainable democracy in Europe were developed by six working groups and are now available on the CivSocDays event webpage.

The take away from this two-day event was that sustainability needs to become the guiding force of the new Commission. (sma)

EESC urges EU leaders to strengthen international role of the euro

In a recently adopted opinion, the EESC has called on EU leaders to step up efforts to strengthen the international role of the euro. A strong euro would contribute to the wellbeing of EU citizens and businesses, uphold common values and promote common interests, the EESC argues.

It also maintains that further measures to enhance economic growth and resilience and the adjustment capacities of the euro area economies would eventually lead to a stronger international role for the euro. The EESC opinion puts forward recommendations which go beyond the European Commission proposals.

Enhanced social cohesion, economic convergence, competitiveness and innovation should be the basis for a stronger euro area economy that supports the common currency. Divergences among and within Member States must be reduced, since these limit EU economic performance.

The EESC also calls for a more unified approach in international diplomacy and a more pro-active stance to promote common interests. This could result in more trade opportunities.
The completion of the Economic and Monetary Union and the Banking Union is another clear priority for the EESC. On this front, the Committee recommends investigating options for creating more liquid and safer euro assets. These could counter the current fragmentation of the euro area’s sovereign bond market, which harms market confidence in the single currency.

Find out more about the EESC recommendations to enhance the international use of the euro and the numerous benefits this would bring to EU citizens and businesses. (jk)

Macro-regional strategies: EESC urges improvement

The EESC calls for macro-regional strategies to be improved and presents a set of policy proposals in an exploratory opinion to tap their full potential.

The proposals, which were presented in June, are based on an in-depth analysis of the existing macro-regional strategies. This analysis revealed that they have served as a useful tool for cohesion policy and enhanced integration and cooperation so far, yet have failed to meet expectations in terms of helping to reduce social and territorial disparities and boost environmental sustainability.

In order to improve the strategies’ impact on reducing disparities, the Committee recommends improving, above all, communication and connectivity between cooperation partners, and encouraging closer involvement of civil society organisations in implementing and monitoring the strategies.

Policy-makers must therefore strengthen policy interventions, boost active commitment to macro-regional strategies and cut red tape. The introduction of functioning networking, interconnection and management for existing databases is another important aspect.

The EESC believes that communication on macro-regional strategies must be improved in order to enhance the visibility of these strategies and foster networking and participation.

Networking and clustering of social partners, local socio-economic actors and civil society organisations should be prioritised both in spatial and sectoral terms. Their involvement in decision-making, planning and evaluating policies is extremely useful for implementing macro-regional strategies, and can also boost cohesion and social and environmental sustainability.

Lastly, the EESC proposes efficient networks for educational activities. These could also help to improve performance regarding environmental sustainability. (jk)

Grand Départ of the Tour de France - EESC hosts event on clean mobility

To mark the Grand Départ of the Tour de France the EESC organized a presentation of a book on Italian cycling champion and wartime hero Gino Bartali with the author, journalist Alberto Toscano, on 3 July. The event also included a debate on clean mobility.

“You must do good, but you must not talk about it” Gino Bartali, the Italian cycling champion, three-time winner of the Giro d’Italia and twice winner of the Tour de France, used to say. His story is portrayed in Alberto Toscano’s book A Bike against Nazi Barbarism, the incredible destiny of the champion Gino Bartali, which was presented at the EESC on 3 July 2019.

An opponent of Mussolini’s regime, Gino Bartali saved the lives of hundreds of Jews in Italy during the Holocaust by acting as a courier, carrying confidential documents on his bike for thousands of kilometres while officially taking the long training rides he was famous for. He was a discreet hero who never talked about his wartime activities, not even once the Second World War was over.
The event at the EESC also included a debate on clean mobility with, among others, Luca Jahier, EESC president, Pierre Jean Coulon, president of the EESC’s TEN section and Philippe Close, mayor of the Central Brussels borough. The aim was to honour not only sports and green modes of transport, but also human values. (mp)

Media should let go of a charity approach to disability

With their often one-dimensional or pitiful portrayal of persons with disabilities, wrought with myths and misconceptions, and a continually insufficient offering of news and entertainment programmes that meet the criteria of full accessibility, European media still have a long way to go before they communicate about disability in an accurate and inclusive way.

The pivotal role played by the media in raising awareness on disability rights and in combating stigma and prejudice towards persons with disabilities, which still permeate all pores of European society, was the main topic on the agenda at the hearing on Communicating Disability Rights, held by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on 28 June in Brussels.

"Communication on disability rights should be considered as an important part of a broader issue of how we portray the diversity of our society in its totality. This is the epicentre of our democratic values. This will be one of the most important issues in the years to come," said EESC Member Ioannis Vardakastanis, opening the event.

The hearing brought together EESC members and representatives from different non-governmental organisations that support persons with disabilities. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and Media Diversity Institute (MDI), a media watchdog that encourages responsible media coverage of diversity, were also represented. (Il)

Essential services should be made available to everyone

Better implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, with a focus on promoting essential services, was one of the topics of the June plenary session, where members adopted an own-initiative opinion on this topic by Raymond Hencks and Krzysztof Balon.

The EESC stresses that everyone must be entitled to access essential services such as water, energy and transport, pointing out that they are vital for social justice.

Some of these services are insufficiently regulated and implemented in the Member States, Mr Hencks emphasised. "We call for the essential services to be made available to everyone", he said, but added that this would not be enough. "The concept of essential services will also have to be clarified and concrete measures taken to fight the existing failures and guarantee good functioning of these services, according to the needs of the users."

The EESC therefore welcomes the fact that principle 20 of the Social Pillar reaffirms the right to access essential services. "These are a vital component of social justice and are underpinned by the principle of equal treatment of users, prohibiting any kind of discrimination or exclusion whatsoever, and by the principle of universal access to services of a high level of affordability and quality," echoed Mr Balon. (mp)

EU leaders urged to make Europe world champion of sustainable development

The national Economic and Social Councils and the European Economic and Social Committee sent a message to EU leaders from Rome, where they met on 13-14 June to discuss their role in the sustainable development of Europe and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The debate was part of the Annual Meeting of the Presidents and Secretaries-General of the EESC and the Economic and Social Councils of the EU Member States, co-organised by the EESC and Italy’s Economic and Social Council (CNEl).

Key speakers in the opening session, attended by the Italian president, Sergio Mattarella, included Italy’s Foreign Minister, Enzo Moavero Milanesi and CNEl president, Tiziano Treu.

EESC president Luca Jahier called on the new European Parliament and the future Commission to exert a firm and decisive political leadership to enable Europe to become world champion of sustainable development.
The main conclusions of the debate, which were sent to the EU's key institutions, were as follows:

- the UN's 2030 Agenda has to be the EU's overarching priority for the next decade to tackle five fundamental transitions:
  - an economic transformation,
  - an energy and ecological transformation,
  - an extensive social transformation,
  - a democratic and participatory transformation and
  - a geopolitical transition in international relations.
- The 2030 Agenda is a win-win strategy:
  - for employers, because the battle for competitiveness will be waged at global level in the sectors linked to the Sustainable Development Agenda;
  - for workers, as several SDGs are linked to the social dimension of Europe;
  - for civil society, which, if fully involved in the governance, could prove decisive in the proper monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs.
- A roadmap needs to be drawn up to boost implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, significant parts of which remain largely unaddressed.
- The European Semester process should also be adapted to the 2030 Agenda
- 40% of the EU's overall budget for 2021-2027 should be devoted to sustainable development.
- The incoming Commission should include a vice-president in charge of making the SDGs part of all EU policies.
- This is a project of hope and resilience that has the potential to consolidate unity and solidarity within the EU, mobilising civil society and young people in particular.
- Economic and Social Councils could act as councils for civic participation, entrusted with the organisation of public consultations on new sustainable development models.
- As the largest economy in the world, the EU must, through its trade policy, play a fundamental role in promoting the sustainable development agenda at a global level.

The full conclusions of the meeting are available here. (dm)

---

**The EU should offer a more comprehensive response to rule of law breaches**

The European Economic and Social Committee has called on the EU to adopt a more proactive approach to tackling the increase in breaches of the rule of law across the EU, amid concerns that they could escalate into a full-blown crisis in democracy and fundamental rights and freedoms.

In an opinion adopted at its plenary session in June, the EESC asked for civil society organisations to be involved more effectively and directly in devising and implementing safeguards against the dismantling of the rule of law in the EU. Many of these organisations raise awareness and act as watchdogs or advocates, and as such are often the first to suffer at the hands of authoritarian governments.

Stressing that it has a special role to play and a duty to act when the activities of its own members and civil society at large are at risk within the EU, the EESC called for better protection for civil society organisations, alongside other key public watchdogs such as journalists, whistle-blowers and human rights defenders.

The opinion is the EESC's input into the reflection process on further strengthening the rule of law within the EU, proposed by the European Commission in a recent communication in which it invited all stakeholders to contribute to the debate.

The EESC said it welcomed the Commission's efforts to use the available means to strengthen the rule of law in the Member States, although it noted their shortcomings in preventing or correcting concerted attacks on fundamental rights and freedoms. (II)

---

**EESC set to support Finnish presidency's climate action**

Committing the Union to significant emissions cuts to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 is the main aim of Finland's EU presidency, which began on 1 July. The EESC will lend its support to the presidency's climate action and continue its own work towards the creation of an EU enabling framework for citizen and community-led climate initiatives.

The other priorities of Finland's presidency are to strengthen common values and the rule of law, make the EU more competitive and socially inclusive, strengthen the EU's position as a global leader on climate action and fully protect the security of citizens.

During its term Finland will face major challenges, including overseeing the Brexit process and negotiations between Member States on the EU's next multiannual financial framework (MFF). On the basis of its policy recommendations on the MFF post-2020, and particularly the sectoral legislative proposals on spending programmes, the EESC will strive to influence negotiations positively with a view to their timely conclusion.
In line with its slogan Sustainable Europe - Sustainable Future, Finland will focus on promoting an ecological meeting culture by holding many of its meetings in Helsinki, where six informal meetings of ministers will take place, and by serving participants Finnish tap water in carafes and locally produced organic food.

The EESC will also hold several meetings in the country of the EU presidency. The EESC Bureau already met in Helsinki on 6 June, and its three Groups have planned to hold meetings in Finland in the coming months (Employers: 8-9 October, Workers: 9 October, Diversity Europe: 16-17 September). This is the third time that Finland has held the rotating presidency since joining the EU in 1995. Its previous terms were in 1999 and 2006. For more information on the EESC’s activities during the Finnish presidency, please see the dedicated brochure at: https://bit.ly/2XHm6xb.

### News from the Groups

**Lowering corporate taxes boosts investments, recent study shows**

by the EESC's Employers' Group

Corporate taxes are the most harmful form of taxation for economic growth. Contrary to public perception, there has been no reduction in corporate tax revenues in relation to GDP in the last 40 years. Countries that have reduced their effective corporate tax rates in recent years have seen increases in investment in the following years. These are some of the conclusions of a recent study commissioned by the European Economic and Social Committee at the request of the Employers’ Group.

A high corporate tax rate can hamper business activity by making certain investment projects unprofitable, and consequently, lowering the tax base and thus revenue collection. On average, a one percentage point increase in the tax rate on foreign direct investments (FDI) leads to a decline of FDI by 3.7%.

Analysis also shows corporate tax cuts do not necessarily lead to significant shortfalls in public finances, but can in fact be approximately self-financing. In the case of six countries, reductions in corporate tax rates led to an increase in revenues. Lower corporate taxes means more growth - cutting the tax rate by 10 percentage points can raise annual growth by 1-2 percentage points.

“The study aims to serve as a useful and reliable tool in the discussion on taxation. This is especially important in the current situation in the European Union, where public perception of the taxation of companies (especially large multinationals) is distorted and exploited by populists”, stated Krister Andersson, vice-president of the Employers' Group. The study provides data and concrete examples to counter-act this narrative.

While tax rates have fallen significantly over the past forty years, the revenues from corporate tax as a share of GDP are still at similar level to the 1980s. Corporate tax revenues are mostly in the range of 2-3 % of GDP while tax revenues from wages, VAT and payroll taxes combined are more than 30%.

The study is available for download on the EESC's website at the following link: https://europa.eu/!NB43bP.

---

**EESC's Workers’ Group debates employment, convergence and social rights in Romania**

by the EESC's Workers' Group

The Workers’ Group held an extraordinary meeting in Bucharest, Romania on 25 June, focusing on labour rights and social convergence: a Europe of common values. Oliver Röpke, the Workers' Group president, congratulated the Romanian Presidency for several achievements that were crucial to improve working people's lives, such as the establishment of the European Labour Authority and the directives on work-life balance and transparent and predictable working conditions.

Discussions focused on key challenges relating to labour mobility, employment and convergence of social rights in the European Union. Marius-Constantin Budăi, Romania’s Minister of Labour and Social Justice, stressed that economic convergence was needed and, in particular, that the pay gap between western and eastern countries had to be reduced.

Several speakers referred to the European Pillar of Social Rights, which, if properly implemented, could lead to upward convergence. The leaders of the five Romanian trade union confederations highlighted the employment and social challenges in Romania, notably high poverty levels, low wages, problems regarding collective bargaining and social dialogue, and high levels of emigration.

On labour mobility, they pointed out that even though it can contribute to economic growth and help address skills gaps in the EU, the loss of too many qualified workers can have a detrimental impact on the home countries, as was the case in Romania, where three million people had emigrated in search of better living conditions.

More information available here.

---

**Arno Metzler, president of the Diversity Europe Group, takes part in the General**
Assembly of UNAF

by the EESC's Diversity Europe Group

On 22 and 23 June, the French National Union of Family Associations (UNAF) held its General Assembly in the city of Reims. Mr Metzler was invited to attend the event by Ms Basset, vice-president of UNAF and Group III member. The main theme discussed was participatory democracy and the role of intermediary bodies.

On behalf of the Diversity Europe Group, Arno Metzler talked to the Assembly about how Europe listens to organised civil society. In his speech about family policy, he announced that the Diversity Europe Group would be holding a conference on New Role Models for Societies in Europe on 12 November 2019.

"I wonder why we do not have a family policy approach at EU level. There is a need to close the gap, as families are important elements of European cultural heritage: they are the glue keeping civil society and civil society organisations together", Mr Metzler said. He added that he would urge Group III "to take the initiative at European level to bring together all those who are involved in making it possible for families to exist in Europe and be defended".

The 600 participants warmly welcomed the idea of a European Family Parliament – following the example of the European Rural Parliament (ERP) set up by Staffan Nilsson. The president of UNAF promised to support and develop this European Family Parliament and to encourage other European networks for families to do the same. (jh)

Soon in the EESC/Cultural events

EESC to showcase Finland's culture in special evening

The EESC is organising a Finnish evening on 17 July to mark the beginning of Finland's presidency of the Council of the EU. The event will feature music and dances typical of Finland's culture and traditions.

Dancer Meri Pajunpää will perform live using the technique of structured improvisation to the sound of Netta Skog's digital accordion. (ck)

Fore more information please visit:
To register please click here.

For the full programme of the evening, click here.