



European Economic and Social Committee

EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil Society

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Editorial



The summer holidays are here! An ideal moment to wind down and recharge our batteries, but also an opportunity to broaden our horizons - crossing borders, discovering new cultures, learning new languages or finding new sources of inspiration.

And then back to work, with new prospects all round such as the arrival of the new European Parliament and European Commission.

The May 2019 European elections have shaken up the way the Parliament is composed. Women and men voted in record numbers to make their voices heard. EU leaders now have five years to put their aspirations into practice. The EU has a unique part to play in supporting the institutions in this ongoing, necessary - and I would say, even indispensable - dialogue with civil society organisations. Ursula von der Leyen is to be

European Commission president. She will bring her work ethic, as well as her dynamic and her vision of Europe to the task. Her inspiring speech in Strasbourg touched on a number of ideas close to our Committee's heart. Six main points emerged from her programme: a green deal for Europe, an economy that serves our people, a Europe keeping up with the digital age, defence of our European way of life, a stronger Europe on the world stage and a new push for European democracy.

When we get back to work in September one of the most prominent items on the EU's institutional agenda will be the hearings with the candidate commissioners and the arrival of the new Commission on 1 November. It is our fervent hope that her call for a college of commissioners made up of equal numbers of women and men will have been heeded.

The European Economic and Social Committee's autumn agenda will also be very heavy: three plenary sessions and, in October, the 13th EESC Civil Society Media Seminar. This year it will be held in Malaga, under the banner "The EU is (for) you - The role of civil society in communicating the advantages of being United in Europe". In December we will have the third seminar of the journalists from the 28 Member States, as well as a number of conferences and public hearings.

I would like to draw your attention in particular to the theme of the 2019 civil society prize, which touches upon both the Commission president's speech and her wish to see gender equality in the membership of the college of commissioners. This year's prize seeks to promote those organisations and women across Europe who are working to make equality a reality. The selected theme is "More women in Europe's society and economy". This will guide the award of the prize for initiatives and innovative projects that promote equal opportunities for men and women and their equal treatment in all spheres of economic and social life.

Happy holidays and see you in September!

Isabel Caño Aguilar

Vice-president for communication

Diary Dates

30 August 2019, Turku, Finland

Smart and Intelligent Europe - How to get there

12 September 2019, Brussels

[Civil society contribution to the next European Semester cycle](#)

16 September 2019, Helsinki, Finland

[Boosting EU competitiveness - 3 pillars for sustainable growth](#)

25-26 September 2019, Brussels

EESC plenary session

In short

[Civil Society Prize in 2019 dedicated to the empowerment of women](#)



The EESC dedicates its flagship Civil Society Prize in 2019 to the empowerment of women and fight for gender equality

Applications for 2019 are now [open](#)

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has launched its Civil Society Prize for 2019. The theme of the 2019 edition is *More women in Europe's society and economy* and the prize will honor innovative initiatives and projects which fight for equal opportunities for women and men and their equal treatment in all spheres of economic and social life.

The EESC Civil Society Prize is open to all civil society organisations officially registered within the European Union and acting at local, national, regional or European level. Individuals can also apply. To be eligible, initiatives or projects must have already be implemented or be still ongoing.

A total of **EUR 50,000** will be awarded to a maximum of five winners. The **deadline for entries is 6 September at 10 a.m** , while the award ceremony will take place on 12 December 2019 in Brussels.

The full description of requirements and the online application form are available on our [webpage](#). (II)

[EESC hosts EU-China meeting on lift safety standardisation](#)



At the initiative of EESC member Antonello Pezzini, the Committee hosted a delegation of representatives from the regulatory bodies of the People's Republic of China on 9 July 2019.

The meeting, opened by EESC Secretary-General **Gianluca Brunetti**, aimed to discuss the future of EU-China relations in the field of standardisation of technical cooperation on lift and escalator safety. "Strengthening relations between Europe and China in such a sensitive area is vitally important, not only for this specific industrial sector but also for the benefit of industry in general," said **Mr Pezzini**.

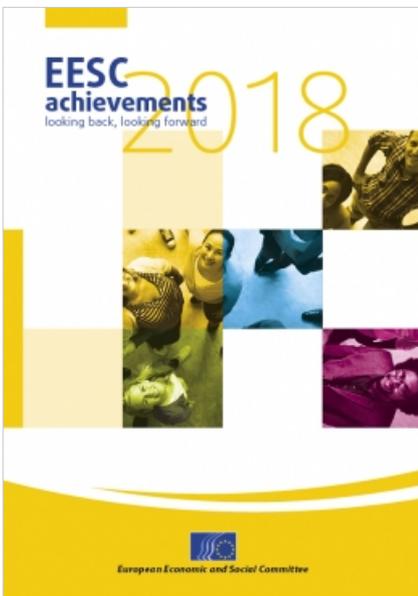
In the wake of this visit to the EESC, the first-ever agreement to create a EU-China joint working group was signed the following day at the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) headquarters in Brussels. The first meeting of the joint working group is scheduled to take place in China in October 2019. (mp)

New publications

[EESC achievements 2018 - looking back, looking forward](#)

The "EESC achievements 2018 - looking back, looking forward" brochure sets out some of the highlights of the European Economic and Social Committee's work in 2018.

Illustrating the EESC's continuing efforts to fulfil the remit given to it more than sixty years ago, the brochure also takes the opportunity to look ahead and learn the lessons that will ensure the Committee remains the clear and active voice of civil society in Europe. You can download it in English from [the EESC website](#). Other languages (French, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish and Dutch) will be available soon. (as).



EESC News

[Finnish EU presidency presents programme based on sustainability and wellbeing](#)



The 18 July plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) played host to Finland's Minister of Social Affairs and Health Aino-Kaisa Pekonen, who presented the programme of the Finnish EU presidency. This includes a special focus on sustainability and the wellbeing of citizens. Ms Pekonen also highlighted enhancing the rule of law and EU values among the presidency's other priorities.

Introducing **Aino-Kaisa Pekonen's** speech, EESC president **Luca Jahier** spoke of the main challenges the Finnish EU presidency would have to address. "The implementation of Agenda 2030", said **Mr Jahier**, "will need a holistic approach that requires economic and social challenges to be addressed together." With this in mind, **Ms Pekonen** announced: "Finland wants to have an impact on the EU's future and this future should be socially, economically and ecologically sustainable."

The EU's global leadership in climate action is therefore a key priority for Finland's presidency. To this end, it expects to reach an agreement on the main elements of a long-term plan committing the EU to climate neutrality by the end of 2019, as requested by the European Council.

The Finnish presidency will also strengthen dialogue not only with other global actors, but also within the EU with other institutions and partners. "Dialogue with social partners is one of the priorities of the Finnish presidency", concluded **Ms Pekonen**. "The EESC plays a key role and we are pleased that it is drafting key opinions that are in line with our proposals." (dgf)

[Conny Reuter: "We are here to promote civil dialogue of a progressive and inclusive Europe"](#)



At its plenary session on 18 July, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) hosted a debate with Conny Reuter, co-chair of the EESC's Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks.

Mr Reuter presented the conclusions and the recommendations of the 2019 Civil Society Days, which took place in mid-June in Brussels, exploring the theme of sustainable democracy. He also spoke of the role of the Liaison Group, established in 2004 as a unique body within the EU, created to ensure a permanent dialogue between the EU institutions and the European network of civil society organisations at the EU level.

"We are here to promote civil dialogue of a progressive and inclusive Europe," **Mr Reuter** told the plenary, stressing the Group's important role of offering an EU perspective on vital topics and policies, rising above national interests.

The EESC President Luca Jahier commended the good work of the EESC Liaison Group: "We are trying to build bridges and not to shut doors. We are here to work together for a better Europe," he stressed.

As a symbol of their close cooperation, every year the Liaison Group and the EESC organise the Civil Society Days in order to highlight the contribution of civil society organisations to the building of a European Union which is more in tune with citizens' aspirations. The event has just marked its 10th anniversary. **Mr Jahier** said the Civil Society Days have become one of the Committee's flagship events. In June, more than 250 participants attended the event. (II)

[Without a strong European battery industry, car manufacturers may leave the EU](#)



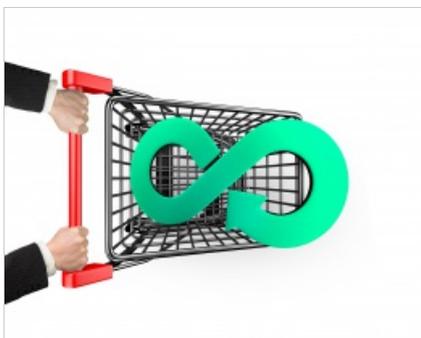
The EESC backs the EU action plan on batteries put together by the European Commission but points out that it needs to be stepped up and implemented swiftly.

There is a real risk that very large parts of the European automotive industry will relocate their production to regions close to battery cell production units, mainly in Asia. In the [opinion](#) drafted by **Colin Lustenhouwer** and adopted at the July plenary session, the EESC throws its support behind the European Commission's Strategic Action Plan on Batteries but warns that it needs to be beefed up and implemented quickly to avoid the possible move of European car factories outside the EU.

"The stakes are very high. We are talking about the jobs of some 13 million European workers in the sector," said **Mr Lustenhouwer**. "There is clearly a widespread sense of urgency among policy-makers, scientists and businesses. They realise that it is late, even too late. We need effective, safe and environmentally-friendly batteries."

Batteries have become indispensable in our daily lives. At the moment, the EU lags far behind, both in terms of development and production and is dependent on non-EU countries, in particular Asia. The Commission's first progress report on the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan on Batteries, published in April 2019, shows that a variety of actions have been launched to develop a significant battery industry in the EU. However, much more has to be done in the EU in the coming years to develop the sector, focusing on investments and innovation. (mp)

[Circular Economy: time to unleash the power of consumers](#)



So far, actions to boost the development of a circular economy in Europe have centred on production, getting industries to introduce circular business models and bring circular options to the market. Now conditions are ripe for getting consumers involved, and empowering them to make sustainable purchasing choices in their daily lives, says an EESC report adopted in July.

In the report, entitled [Consumers in the circular economy](#), the European Economic and Social Committee calls for a strategic shift to place consumers at the centre of public policy on the circular economy at all levels of government in Europe.

In the first stage of the circular economy, consumers have been confined to the role of urban agents recycling domestic waste while the focus was on business. European Commission initiatives, the EESC points out, have targeted regulation and production, boosting recycling levels and introducing the concept of eco-design.

"Now it is time for the Circular Economy 2.0 to tackle the consumer end," says EESC rapporteur **Carlos Trias Pintó**, urging the European Commission to spearhead the shift in its forthcoming initiatives.

This second phase, he stresses, will hinge on **consumer information**. Information and education, are key factors in steering consumers towards circular behaviour patterns. Education and lifelong learning must therefore be put in place and consumers provided with the most objective information possible.

The EESC makes the case for **voluntary labelling** as a step towards **mandatory labelling**, indicating the product's **social and environmental footprint** – emission reduction, biodiversity conservation, resource efficiency or avoidance of components with a high environmental impact, estimated lifespan, possibility of obtaining spare parts and options for repair.

However, even though information and education can go a long way towards steering consumers towards green, repairable, long-lasting products, many people will not be able to afford them. As an incentive, the EESC suggests that the Member States could adopt a rewards-based approach and local administrations could use public procurement to support sustainable suppliers. (dm)

[European agriculture should move in the direction of agroecology](#)



The EU needs to place greater emphasis on short supply chains and agroecology in farming in order to preserve its agriculture and make it more resilient to new challenges such as climate change. Agroecology is also a way of securing our food supply and of making our food healthier, thus raising its value. Short supply chains will help smaller farms to increase their income and enliven rural areas.

"Short supply chain initiatives have the potential to create jobs and growth and consequently wealth, particularly in rural areas. The challenge is therefore to empower operators to create local food systems based on local governance. Digitalisation plays - and will also in the future play - a key role, both in production and processing and in buying and selling", explains **Geneviève Savigny**, rapporteur for the opinion on [promoting short and alternative food supply chains in the EU: the role of agroecology](#).

In order to roll out the agroecology project across Europe, the EESC proposes a structured multifaceted action plan involving regional, national and EU levels. Existing programmes should also be directed towards supporting measures in agroecology and short supply chains.

A comprehensive food policy, which the EESC has been advocating for years and for which it could be a facilitator, could form the framework for the action plan. (sma)

[Framework for a renaissance of Europe's manufacturing industry must be based](#)

[on SMEs' real needs](#)



According to the EESC, the European manufacturing system can only make an effective and competitive transition to a cutting-edge digital and environmentally-friendly economy when it is ready for significant investment in innovation. The steps planned by the European Commission to facilitate better development of the manufacturing system should therefore be based on a real awareness of companies' - especially SMEs' - needs.

Manufacturing accounts for 17.3% of Europe's GDP and representing 80 % of exports. "In view of these impressive numbers, it is essential that Europe pool its forces to maintain and even strengthen this sector", said **Antonello Pezzini**, rapporteur for the EESC's information report on [Incremental innovation in high manufacturing areas](#).

The EESC calls on Europe and its Member States to put in place appropriate educational strategies, which are crucial to acquiring new skills and developing new career paths.

The current industrial revolution uses digital models such as cloud computing and big data, and is moving towards the prospect of the internet of things and "smart" goods. Artificial intelligence is of particular importance in this process, as it has the potential to double annual growth rates within 20 years.

"Europe needs to take decisive steps regarding digital technology and facilitate high tech access to SMEs. **The EESC therefore calls for special measures and policies that enable SMEs to increase networking with larger companies and also introduce incentives triggering cooperation in innovation between small and large companies**", concluded Mr Pezzini. (sma)

[European Semester and a new governance approach are crucial for future EU economic policy](#)



The EU should renew its system of economic policy coordination and governance based on a new EU strategy post-2020 for sustainable development, to increase the efficiency of actions and the sustainability of results, says the EESC.

In this context, in a recently adopted [opinion](#) the EESC welcomes the Commission's proposal to build up stronger links between the European Semester and cohesion funding under the next MFF. It believes that these links have huge potential to improve coordination and governance of the EU's economic policy.

The EESC proposes moreover that a renewed system of EU governance should rely more on its understanding of and cooperation with civil society and enhance multi-level public administration. In this context, it proposes establishing an EESC information centre for

stakeholders.

Another EESC [opinion](#) calls for closer links between the EFSI, its follow-up - the InvestEU programme - and other European or national investment programmes. It recommends setting clear investment targets, regulatory simplification and further guidance in order to achieve greater geographical and sectoral balance in the framework of the Investment Plan for Europe.

If the EU uses the European Semester as the most important element of economic policy coordination, it could contribute to the implementation of these recommendations. (jk)

[EESC makes recommendations for future EU economic policy and EMU governance](#)



In July, the EESC presented proposals for the economic agenda of the upcoming legislative period and recommended that they should form the basis of a new EU economic strategy.

Future economic policy and governance should, in the EESC's view, take account of geopolitical and societal challenges, such as the global economic slowdown, unresolved trade disputes, Brexit, climate and demographic change, growing inequalities and the fourth industrial revolution, and contribute to strengthening resilience to crises and the sustainability of the economic model. These challenges require a far-reaching economic strategy with clear policy objectives and a more coherent economic governance framework.

All four pillars of EMU - the monetary and financial, the economic, the social and the political - must be reinforced in a balanced way and a positive narrative for the future development of the EU economy is needed. The EESC calls amongst other things for the creation of a fiscal capacity at euro area level, the balancing of supply- and demand-side measures and enhanced involvement of the European Parliament, social partners and civil society organisations in key social and economic policy decisions.

Regarding upward convergence, the EESC believes that education and training, R&D and innovation need to be promoted. These measures can strengthen the competitiveness of the EU economy based on its capacity to increase its productivity and living standards in a sustainable manner while at the same time becoming climate neutral.

More information: [ECO/492](#) & [ECO/493 \(jk\)](#)

[EESC calls on Commission to better reconcile its industry and energy legislation with its climate policy](#)



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) calls on the Commission to reflect in more depth on policy options that help both to reduce greenhouse gases, thus fighting climate change, and to maintain competitiveness. The goal must be to better protect and promote the EU's resource and energy-intensive industries (REII), otherwise Europe runs the risk of losing jobs to less clean economies and missing its goal of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

"The current Emissions Trading System (ETS) aimed at encouraging investment falls short, since its application worldwide is not in reach for the time being. If it is only applied in Europe, it brings the risk of carbon leakage and consequently investment leakage", warned **Aurel Laurențiu Plosceanu**, rapporteur for the EESC's opinion on [The sectoral industrial perspective of reconciling climate and energy policies](#), adopted on 17 July. "Future

investment by the EU and the Member States should be concentrated on RDI and the deployment of low to zero-carbon technologies for both the REIIs and the necessary electric power generation. Another focus must be on education and training of their workforce", added co-rapporteur **Enrico Gibellieri**.

Since energy costs in for instance the steel, aluminium and glass industries represent around 25% of total costs, the costs of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are also high. With the ETS in place, European products will become more expensive and run the risk of being replaced by cheaper products on the international market. (sma)

[Energy Union must become part of Europeans' daily life](#)



The EESC's annual opinion on the State of the Energy Union takes stock of progress so far and calls on the European Commission to focus more on social aspects.

"The Energy Union is not a reality yet. It may be a reality in terms of EU policy decisions, but it is still not a reality in the daily lives of European citizens." That was the firm view advanced by **Christophe Quarez** at the July plenary session, echoing the argument in his [opinion](#) – adopted by the assembly – that the energy transition had not yet happened on the ground. He went on: "Now that EU policymakers have laid the foundations of the Energy Union, a lot remains to be done in the next few years."

The change of format in the decision-making process for energy policy, both at EU and national level, was key, said **Mr Quarez**. We needed to move from "decisions by a few" to "action by all". "This has never been so achievable," he added, "given the rise in climate awareness among EU citizens, especially Europe's young people."

Welcoming the Fourth Report on the State of the Energy Union issued by the European Commission in April 2019, the Committee expressed once again its support for the objectives of the Energy Union and stressed the importance of the engagement and mobilisation of European society in its entirety to take full ownership.

Citizens should drive the energy transition and nobody should be left behind. The social implications of these changes have to be considered, with a new social pact between all parties involved. Citizens should also be able to contribute to all major political decisions relating to climate change, especially at EU level, through a permanent citizens' dialogue. (mp)

[EESC calls for European action to ensure participatory development of blockchain technology](#)



Originally associated with cryptocurrencies, blockchain and distributed ledger technology (DLT) are in fact very versatile and can be usefully applied to the social economy. However, it is important to regulate them properly and gear them towards delivering benefits for all, allowing everyone to participate, says the EESC in a report issued at its July plenary.

The EESC has drawn up a long list of **possible applications** for blockchain and DLT that could be of great interest to social economy enterprises. These include tracing donations and fundraising, improving the governance of social economy organisations, authenticating activities, certifying skills, making intellectual property rights and copyright clearer and more certain, providing secure telemedicine and e-care systems and making agricultural products fully traceable and identifiable.

Nevertheless, the huge potential of the new digital technologies, coupled with the considerable investment required, also exposes blockchain technology to the **risk of concentration** of data and technological networks being subject to speculation, warns the EESC.

It is important that there be public measures to **support the development of these technologies in a participatory and accessible way**, and the **involvement of civil society** is imperative.

EU regulation makes sense because this technology uses **chains that can be created irrespective of national borders**. The large investments required call for **coordinated, structured European action**.

Read the EESC's opinion entitled [Blockchain and distributed ledger technology as an ideal infrastructure for the social economy](#) (dm)

News from the Groups

[Employers' Group will meet twice in Finland to discuss on artificial intelligence and a business-friendly EU](#)



by the EESC's Employers' Group

The EESC Employers' Group will be hosting two conferences in the country of the current European Council presidency - Finland. The first event will take place at the end of August and will focus on a smart and intelligent Europe.

The conference will be held in Turku on 30 August, under the title *"Smart and Intelligent Europe - How to get there"*. It will focus on the opportunities and challenges presented by digitalisation and AI for businesses, on the enablers of success in this field and on the consequent expectations for EU policies. It aims to examine, among other things, how Europe can be a frontrunner in innovation, what skills and competences are needed and how

funding can be enabled.

Members of the Employers' Group will exchange views on these issues with high-level speakers such as the mayor of Turku, **Minna Arve**, MEP **Miapetra Kumpula-Natri** and the chair of "One Sea", **Sauli Eloranta**. The seminar will be part of the Turku Europe Forum, where citizens and decision makers will discuss the future of Europe and of Finland.

"An open Europe - How does it benefit us all?" will be the theme of the second Finnish conference, to be held in Helsinki on 9 October. It aims to develop the role of an open economy and society in building a strong and business-friendly EU. The timing of the conference, coinciding with the start of the new term of the European Commission and the European Parliament, makes it possible to convey a strong business message to policy-makers at both EU and national level.

Both events are jointly organised by the Employers' Group and the Confederation of Finnish Industries (Ij/ek)

[Workers' Group statement on the criminalisation of solidarity](#)



by the EESC's Workers' Group

In the light of the desperate humanitarian situation in the Mediterranean, characterised by a disrespect for EU principles and values and worsening in recent weeks, the Workers' Group maintains that:

- solidarity is NOT and will never be a crime
- saving lives is the paramount human obligation both morally and in terms of international law
- the humanitarian action and selfless activity of civil society must never be criminalised
- immigration should not be used as a political instrument.

The Workers' Group reaffirms its full support for – and solidarity with – all those organisations, men and women who act to save lives. (prp)

[Diversity Europe group goes to Helsinki to sustainable growth and ways of boosting EU competitiveness](#)



by the EESC's Diversity Europe Group

On 16 and 17 September, the Diversity Europe group will host an extraordinary meeting in Helsinki. In line with Finland's priorities for its Presidency of the Council of the EU, *"Sustainable Europe - Sustainable Future"*, our group has chosen to concentrate on three pillars that facilitate sustainable growth and thus boost EU competitiveness: bioeconomy and a climate-neutral Europe, digitalisation, and infrastructure.

The first day of the meeting will take place in the Annex Building of the Parliament and will be dedicated to a conference on the topic ***"Boosting EU competitiveness - three pillars for sustainable growth"***. The main purpose of this conference is to examine and debate challenges, opportunities, consequences, best practices and ways of increasing EU competitiveness. The session will open with keynote speeches by officials, representatives of the Finnish government and Parliament, and representatives of the organisations to which our Group III Finnish members are affiliated.

A study trip to rural venues near Helsinki, related to sustainable forest management and logistics in the forestry sector, will take place on the second day. (ih)

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