



European Economic and Social Committee

# EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil Society

December 2019 | EN

## The Grassroots View - an EESC podcast

Episode 1 - **Whatever happened to the rule of law ?**

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**The Grassroots View** is a new podcast series launched by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). It explores the hot topics everyone seems to be debating these days, but does so from a civil society perspective, bringing testimonies from stakeholders on the ground and accounts from the EESC members who represent their interests in Brussels.

Episode 1 **Whatever happened to the rule of law?** features Spanish EESC member **José Antonio Moreno Díaz**, who explains what the EESC Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law is doing to help fend off growing attacks on core EU values, such as those described by the other two guests on the podcast – **Jolanta Kurska** of the Polish Geremek Foundation and **Wojciech Przybylski**, editor-in-chief of Visegrad Insight in Warsaw. (II)

## Available Languages:

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## Editorial



**The American journalist and feminist Gloria Steinem declared that "a gender-equal society would be one where the word 'gender' does not exist, where everyone can be themselves."**

However, to get there we need to work harder. Although there has been progress, gender equality is still just a dream. At the EESC, we have been working for many years to raise awareness on this topic and put it on the agenda. We no longer want to hear mere declarations of good intentions about equality, we want political decisions to be taken to achieve it.

We must overcome sexist stereotypes. We must challenge the stereotypes put forward by certain media, religious or other groups. What we demand is for gender inequality to be actively fought in all areas; otherwise we will have to wait another century to achieve it.

Education and information should guide public opinion on gender equality, have a positive influence on public opinion and help increase the pressure for better representation of women in society, the economy, politics and decision-making.

Gender equality was already enshrined in the Treaty of Rome, signed on 25 March 1957 as a fundamental topic and the principle of equal pay for equal work was introduced in the first treaties. More than 60 years later, we still have not achieved this one goal in the fight for gender equality.

On the contrary, the world of work still does not reflect the gender balance in the population: while women make up 51% of the EU population, only 67% of them are working. Only 31% of all entrepreneurs are women. At global level, they only make up

39% of the working population and only contribute 37% to global GDP. This imbalance holds back sustained economic development, innovation and social progress.

According to studies, if women participated in the economy at the same level as men, the global GDP would increase 26% by 2025. Gender inequality is therefore not only a moral and social issue, but also an economic challenge.

Our institution also reflects this imbalance – only 30% of our members are women.

The European Economic and Social Committee therefore decided to dedicate the 2019 edition of its flagship Civil Society Prize to organisations that work to promote an increase in the presence of women in the socioeconomic makeup of the EU. The prize rewards innovative initiatives and projects that aim to fight for equal opportunities for men and women and their equal

treatment in all areas.

The five best projects have already been selected, and I am proud to say that the prize will go to people who want to make the world a better place, not only for women but for our society as a whole!

This issue of EESCInfo is the last one of the year, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your excellent cooperation and wish you all the best for 2020.

**Isabel Caño Aguilar**

**Vice-president for communication**

## Diary Dates

19 December 2019, Brussels

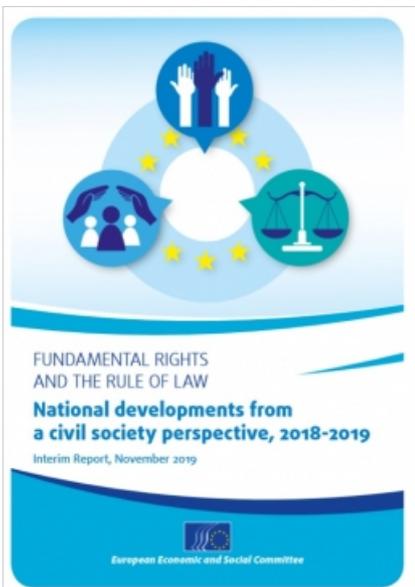
16th meeting of the EU advisory group for the EU-Central America Association Agreement

22-23 January 2020, Brussels

EESC plenary session

## In short

### [The EESC holds its first conference dedicated to the rule of law](#)



**The EESC conference on "[Fundamental rights and the rule of law - trends in the EU from a civil society perspective](#)", which took place on 5 November in Brussels, signalled the urgent need to involve civil society in promoting a culture of the rule of law in Europe.**

With reports of breaches of the core EU values on the rise, this conference highlighted the need for a mature and structured dialogue between governments and civil society to reverse backsliding on the rule of law in the EU.

The conference built on the EESC's newly published [report](#) on the rule-of-law situation in Europe. It was compiled by the EESC's Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law (FRRL), following the Group's initial visits to Member States in 2018 and 2019 aimed at detecting general trends in this core EU value and specific national features. The FRRL group plans to visit all EU Member States in the coming years. (II)

### [European Economic and Social Committee to introduce new logo](#)

**With its three loops, the new logo symbolises the spirit of compromise between the Committee's three Groups, which is at the heart of the EESC's work.**

The current logo has remained unchanged for 21 years. The new one is in line with the logos of the other EU institutions and is designed to strengthen the Committee's visual identity not only in the institutional environment of Brussels, but also in the Member States.

The new logo will be introduced across the full range of visual products over the next ten months and should be fully rolled out in time for the EESC renewal in October 2020. (ks)



## Season's greetings



We want to thank you for your interest over 2019: every like, share and retweet, and every word of encouragement is hugely appreciated!

We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous 2020.

The EESC info team

## EESC News

### [Green light from European Parliament for new European Commission - Launch on 1 December 2019](#)



#### **Statement by Luca Jahier, EESC President**

**Team #vonderleyen gets the green light: Let's now deliver a Sustainable Europe in the interest of its citizens!**

27.11.2019

Today's vote in the European Parliament opens the way to a new era for Europe. I am convinced that new Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, and her team of Executive Vice-Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Commissioners, will usher in a new momentum for our continent, after the encouraging results of the European elections in May. Our citizens have given us five years to build the Europe of tomorrow and we should not waste this opportunity.

The new Commission President's agenda for Europe, which has included the Green Deal as our new growth strategy for a sustainable Europe, gender equality and fundamental rights, closely reflects the priorities of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Our house of European civil society firmly believes that it is high time that the EU embraces and implements an ambitious sustainable agenda. This will require a shift in our mindsets.

At its October plenary session, the EESC presented its contribution to the work programme of the European Commission for the next five years, pointing out that the EU must focus on climate change, digitalisation, the rule of law and globalisation, and must embrace a new system of governance, one that more closely involves civil society organisations.

The EESC advises the European Commission to structure its future work plan for 2020 and beyond around this pillar. The Committee also calls for an overarching EU 2050 strategy for sustainability, in order to implement the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals - something that the European Union has committed to achieving by 2030.

We need to act at all levels simultaneously and create a dynamic of action to address urgent environmental, economic and social challenges. Implementing the Social Pillar for a fair and just transition is paramount. The Committee also stresses that a new EU governance structure, as well as new rules and instruments for drawing up and implementing EU policies, is crucial. In particular, the role of the European Parliament should be enhanced, in order to strengthen democratic accountability.

The goal of sustainability in all its dimensions calls for considerable effort and engagement by all the parties involved. Open democratic debate, underpinned by the structured involvement of civil society, is therefore vital in making the transition fair and effective.

We have also noted Ms von der Leyen's decision to launch a new push for European democracy through a Conference on the Future of Europe. Such a conference must be organised with the full involvement of the EESC, as the EU institution that is closest to the citizens

and the most authentic embodiment of participatory democracy. Finally, I am delighted to see that culture is now recognised as the bridge between our past and future, and included with a new name in the portfolio of Commissioner Mariya Gabriel.

We are now, more than ever, committed to supporting a Union that strives for more.

As the new President said, let's get to work, TOGETHER!

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## **"Brexit is just a stage, not a final destination"**



**The EESC October plenary session included a debate with Michel Barnier, European Union chief negotiator for Brexit, on 30 October. During the debate, Mr Barnier called for a close partnership between the EU and the UK after Brexit, bearing in mind that peace in Ireland must be a priority and that "the integrity of the single market is not negotiable".**

**Michel Barnier** outlined his view of the status of the Brexit negotiations to EESC members and insisted that the European Commission was determined to agree on an orderly Brexit, as *"the risk of Brexit happening without a ratified deal still exists"*. He also stressed that *"Brexit is just a stage, not a final destination"* and that the most important challenge is now to rebuild a new partnership between the EU and the UK, based on two pillars: economic exchange and cooperation in the area of security and defence.

The president of the EESC, **Luca Jahier**, opened the debate, underlining the important role that civil society representatives could play in a post-Brexit scenario. *"It is crucial for the relationship built up over the last 44 years with British civil society organisations to be not only preserved but even strengthened; there is still a long way to go and it will be hard work, but the EESC will always be on your side"*, Mr Jahier said. (sma/dgf)

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## **And the EESC Civil Society Prize goes to...**



**The European Economic and Social Committee has chosen five finalists from among the nearly 180 inspiring projects it received for its 2019 Civil Society Prize dedicated to the empowerment of women and the fight for gender equality.**

The nominees, listed here in alphabetical order, are:

- **Fairy Tales project**, by the Bulgarian NAIA Association, which teaches gender equality to pre-school children via classic fairy tales;
- **#mimmitkoodaa (Women Code)**, a programme by the Finnish Software and eBusiness Association (Ohjelmisto- ja e-business ry) combatting the stereotype that all software developers are men by default;
- **Polish Women's Strike**, which empowers women activists in small and medium-sized cities fighting for change;
- **The Brussels Binder** from Belgium, which advocates better representation of women in European policy debates;
- **Women's Toponymy**, an Italian project working to increase the number of places bearing the names of notable women, giving them the public recognition they deserve.

The award ceremony will be held on 12 December during the EESC plenary session in Brussels, when the final ranking will be revealed. The winner of the first prize will go home with EUR 14 000 and the remaining finalists will receive EUR 9 000 each.

The EESC chose this theme for the 2019 Civil Society Prize as it wanted to reiterate its strong commitment to gender equality, something that is still not a reality in Europe. Women continue to earn less than men, suffer from discrimination and are often victims of gender violence. By honouring projects that show tangible achievements in fostering equal opportunities, the EESC hopes to highlight progress made towards a more equal society for women and men and encourage further action. (II)

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## [EU rights and citizenship should not be for sale](#)



**In recent years, in the aftermath of the financial crisis, several EU Member States have set up investor citizenship and residence schemes to attract investment and increase their revenues. According to an opinion adopted by the EESC at its October plenary session, this practice poses serious risks and should be banned in all EU Member States.**

A large number of EU Member States have set up schemes allowing non-EU citizens fast-track access to EU citizenship or residence in exchange for making a significant investment in the Member State in question – known as "golden passports" or "golden visas". The EESC calls these practices into question in its opinion on [Investor Citizenship and Residence Schemes in the European Union](#) and urges Member States to phase out these schemes or provide reasonable arguments for not doing so.

The EESC's opinion endorses a recent [report by the European Parliament's research service](#), which also calls for an end to all existing schemes as soon as possible. In addition, a [report issued by the European Commission](#) points out that these schemes pose risks in terms of security, money laundering, tax evasion and circumvention of EU rules.

**Jean-Marc Roirant**, rapporteur for the EESC's opinion, underlined that *"these schemes often do not comply with the fundamental rights underpinning European cooperation"* and stressed the need to phase out the schemes across the EU: *"The EESC is very worried about the promotion of EU rights and EU citizenship as a product for sale"*. (dgf)

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## [Sustainable development must be top priority for the future of Europe](#)



**Sustainable development must be at the heart of Europe's future. In the resolution drafted by Patricia Círez Miqueleiz, Rudy De Leeuw and Lutz Ribbe and adopted at the October plenary session, the EESC advises the European Commission to structure its future work plan for 2020 and beyond around this pillar. The Committee calls for an overarching EU 2050 strategy for sustainability in order to implement the UN 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which the European Union has committed to achieving by 2030.**

*"We are happy to give our strong and balanced input into the EU's political priorities for the five years to come. We support the Green Deal championed by the Commission's president-elect, Ursula von der Leyen, as a key driver for change. We need to act at all levels simultaneously and create a dynamic of action to address urgent environmental, economic*

*and social challenges,"* said the EESC president, **Luca Jahier**.

The EESC stresses that the scale and speed of change call for prompt measures in four areas: climate change, digitalisation, the rule of law and globalisation. The Committee also states that a new EU governance structure is crucial, along with new rules and instruments for defining and implementing EU policies. In particular, the role of the European Parliament should be enhanced in order to strengthen democratic accountability. The EESC has an active contribution to make to the Conference on the Future of Europe proposed by Ms von der Leyen for 2020.

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## ["A geo-strategic and historic mistake"](#)



**EESC criticises Council decision not to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania**

The EESC is deeply disappointed by EU leaders' decision, at the European Council on 17-18 October, to further postpone accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania.

EESC President **Luca Jahier** found it *"the wrong decision for the second time, and the breaking of a promise, putting Europe's credibility at stake"*. He called the EESC resolution *"a silent commitment of solidarity"*.

In its resolution, the EESC calls not opening negotiations a **geo-strategic and historic mistake**. *"The EU must not disregard that other global players are stretching their wings and becoming more active in the region"*, underlined Mr Jahier.

*"Europe is hope for the Western Balkans, particularly for young people"*, said **Dilyana Slavova**, president of the EESC External Relations section, calling on members to see the enlargement as a reunification.

The declaration of the 7th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum reiterated that enlargement would spread democratic values and legal standards to the Western Balkans. Members warned that the signal that opening negotiations would have sent to the population should not be underestimated.

*"We need to stick to our promise, and we need to give hope to the people"*, was the common credo. (dgf)

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## [Culture can be a driver for strengthening the EU](#)

**Europe.**

**The EESC October plenary hosted a debate on *rEUnaissance - A cultural vision for***

Opening the debate, EESC president **Luca Jahier** welcomed the fact that Emmanuel Macron had embraced his idea of a Renaissance for Europe. *"We should not forget that our continent was a cultural area before it was a political idea, and such an area does not imply homogeneity, but thrives on variation and*



movement."

**Andre Wilkens**, director of the [European Cultural Foundation](#), stated that culture could be misused to divide communities, becoming a threat to European integration. *"We should not underestimate the power of culture to make a difference"*, agreed **Pier Luigi Sacco**, special adviser to European Commissioner Tibor Navracsics, explaining how culture could be a driver for change by making people less worried about the unknown.

**Elke Kaschl Mohni**, director of the [Goethe Institute in Brussels](#), referred to the role of culture in external relations and placed the focus on fairness and people-to-people exchanges. *"The aim of cultural relations is to strengthen trust and understanding"*, she said. Lastly, **Airan Berg**, artistic director of the [Festival of the Regions](#), explained how culture and art could make people move out of their comfort zone.

**Mr Jahier** concluded that culture should be a priority in policy-making and suggested setting up a new body at the EESC to deal with cultural issues. (sma)

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## [EESC calls for initiatives to seize the huge growth opportunities of the blue bioeconomy](#)



**The potential of the blue bio-economy remains untapped in the EU. The EESC therefore recommends pan-European pilot projects involving local stakeholders and the scientific community.**

At the request of the Finnish presidency, the EESC has drawn up an exploratory opinion on the [Blue bioeconomy](#), which refers to economic activities based on the sustainable use of renewable aquatic resources and related expertise. The opinion was adopted at the EESC's October plenary session.

As the rapporteur **Simo Tiainen** explained, *"Restoring the biodiversity of seas, lakes and rivers would open up new opportunities for businesses. This requires technological innovation and financial support through appropriate instruments."*

The blue bioeconomy should become a focal point for the EU's cooperation programme with the United Nations and serve as a tool for achieving the climate change goals in the Paris Agreement. *"This will require important efforts in restoring the biodiversity in marine and inland waters as well as in tapping their potential for CO<sub>2</sub> capture. In this way we can also create quality jobs in rural, coastal and island areas"*, concluded co-rapporteur Henri Malosse. (mr)

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## [EESC proposes introducing EU certification for trusted AI products](#)



**The EESC suggests that the EU should develop a certification for trustworthy AI, to be delivered by an independent body after testing the products for key requirements such as resilience, safety, and absence of prejudice, discrimination or bias. The proposal has been put forward in two recent EESC opinions assessing the [European Commission's ethical guidelines on AI](#)**

The EESC believes that such certification would go a long way towards increasing public trust in AI in Europe. While some people insist that, for people to trust AI applications, algorithms need to be explainable, the fact is that AI systems and machine learning are so complex that even people who are developing them do not really know what their outcome will be, and have to develop testing tools to see where their limits are.

The EESC proposes **entrusting the testing to an independent body** – an agency, a consortium or some other entity to be determined – which would test the systems for prejudice, discrimination, bias, resilience, robustness and particularly **safety**. Companies could use the certificate to prove that they are developing AI systems that are safe, reliable and in line with European values and standards.

*"AI products can be compared to medicines"*, says **Franca Salis-Madinier**, rapporteur for the EESC's [general opinion on the European Commission's communication](#). *"Medicines can be beneficial, but also dangerous, and before they can be put on the market they need to be certified. The manufacturers need to prove that they have done enough trials and testing to ensure that their product is beneficial. The same approach should be taken for AI machines."*

The EESC also stresses that need for clear rules on responsibility. *"Responsibility must always be linked to a person, either natural or legal. Machines cannot be held liable in the case of failure"*, says **Ulrich Samm**, rapporteur of the [EESC opinion on AI on the implications of the guidelines on the automotive sector](#). The **insurability of AI systems** is also a question that needs to be looked into as a matter of priority, highlights the EESC. (dm)

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## [Blockchain: the EU should become world leader](#)

**Blockchain technology has the potential to transform society, but there is a need for legal clarity and certainty and therefore a common EU approach. This is the key message of an own-initiative opinion adopted by the EESC on 30 October, which also calls on the European Commission to launch a comprehensive initiative to make the EU a global authority in this field.**

This technology can be applied in many sectors to increase security and transparency, and can even contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs). However, as the EESC says in its opinion, several challenges have yet to be addressed and there is an urgent need to provide clarity and certainty, and to protect privacy.



The EESC therefore calls for a common EU approach and asks the Commission to launch a comprehensive initiative with the SDGs at its core. The initiative should be complemented by an action plan for Europe to enable it to become the reference point for blockchain worldwide.

To this end, tackling legal uncertainty is a priority. The current legislative framework is unclear and fragmented at Member State level. It is also essential to protect privacy, ensure interoperability between the different blockchain technology platforms and reduce transaction costs that are in many cases prohibitive. (dgf)

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## [EESC calls for a CAP that helps ensure generational renewal](#)



**Cooperation and partnership between the EU, national governments and civil society will be crucial to fostering generational renewal of the farming population.**

*"Generational renewal is a problem that goes far beyond a reduction in the average age of EU farmers. It is essentially a matter of rethinking the whole strategy so that younger people are attracted to the farming profession, thus revitalising the rural world", stressed **Piroska Kállay**, rapporteur for the EESC opinion on this issue, which was adopted at the EESC plenary session in October.*

Co-rapporteur **John Bryan** said: *"There is a need for greater coherence between CAP measures and national legal frameworks and taxation policies to facilitate the transfer of holdings."*

The biggest concerns of the EU's young farmers are farm income, bureaucracy, unfair competition, financing, access to land, access to methods of practical knowledge transfer, lack of basic services like broadband, and social isolation. Successful implementation of generational renewal is one of the most important challenges of our times, but also constitutes an opportunity.

It is therefore fundamentally important to address all these issues in the 2021-2027 CAP budget in order to meet the funding requirements for meaningful support. To this end, the EESC proposes that a minimum of 2% of the CAP budget (Pillars I and II) should be allocated to supporting young farmers. (mr)

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## [European Semester: The 2020 cycle must focus on sustainable and inclusive growth](#)



**The EESC urges that in 2020, the coordination of economic policies across the Member States must lead to averting the risk of recession and steering the EU's economy towards a path of sustainable and inclusive growth. This should include increased reform efforts, investment, compliance with the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) as well as more structured civil society involvement in the European Semester process.**

In three recently adopted documents, the EESC welcomed further development of the European Semester in 2019, such as the new focus on investment and a larger role for social and environmental objectives. However, it also demanded a series of further adjustments which could improve the Semester, mitigate the current risks and increase the resilience and growth potential of the EU and the euro area economies.

The EESC believes, for instance, that it is essential for fiscal policy to accompany the ECB's accommodative monetary policy with a positive aggregate fiscal stance of the euro area, while respecting the principles of fiscal discipline.

This should be accompanied by other important measures within the next European Semester cycle that:

- encourage effective structural reforms through well targeted investment strategies;
- focus equally on social, environmental, macroeconomic and fiscal goals;
- foster further public and private investment;
- address low MIP compliance by Member States.

Finally, the EESC calls for enhanced civil society involvement at European and national level and all stages in the European Semester. This could lead to stronger commitment to and ownership of reforms at national level and, consequently, to a more effective and sustainable exercise. Along these lines, the Committee recommends that an annual consultation of civil society be organised under its aegis in each Member State and at EU level.

The Committee provided its **policy input to the next cycle of the European Semester** in two follow-up opinions, respectively on the [Annual Growth Survey](#) and on the [recommendation for the economic policy of the euro area](#), and one [information report](#) on a series of country visits regarding civil society involvement in the Semester process. (jk)

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## [Rail should serve as a model for a smooth and inclusive transition to the digital age](#)

**In an own-initiative opinion adopted in October, the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI) at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) called for an [inclusive sectoral transition to a digitalised rail sector](#) and proposed a Commission-led initiative to raise the EUR 100 billion investment needed.**

"To accelerate digitalisation, it is important to also accelerate the deployment of the European Railway Traffic Management System," said the rapporteur **Alberto Mazzola**. "Rail could become the backbone for developing the mobility aspect of a European digital identity through a regulatory environment that drives competition and innovation."

Development of the technical and regulatory framework should also be top of the agenda. "Europe's social partners need to establish dialogue to anticipate and mitigate the impact of automation and digitalisation, thereby ensuring a fair transition," stressed co-rapporteur **Guy Greivelding**.

Throughout the transition phase towards a digitalised railway system, it is also important to consider the security aspect and embrace robust cybersecurity measures. The EESC, therefore, recommends stronger collaboration in this regard between the EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and the EU Agency for Railways (ERA). (sma)

## News from the Groups

### Business can support sustainability



By the EESC's Employers Group

**Sustainability is paramount for business and employers, who play a crucial role as drivers of development. A sound and solid economy is a necessary enabler of sustainable development. We need to identify solutions which are economically, socially and environmentally beneficial. While various stakeholders have much in common in their perceptions of sustainability, they often differ on how to get there.**

These are some of the conclusions of the discussion on *How business can promote sustainability* that took place on 21 November 2019 in Barcelona, Spain.

"Business is not a problem for sustainability, it is a solution," said **Jacek Krawczyk**,

president of the Employers' Group in his welcoming address. He pointed out that business provides and introduces both climate and environmental solutions.

During the main discussion, representatives of all three EESC groups put forward their views on sustainability. The debate showed that despite diverging views on sustainability among employers, workers and environmentalists, there is significant common ground. "Competition is key to sustainable development. Competition requires a good regulatory environment but definitely not more regulation," said **Tellervo Kylä-Haracka-Ruonala** in summarising the discussion.

The meeting took place during MedaWeek, a yearly conference promoting Mediterranean economic integration. The members of the Employers' Group addressed the New Africa Business Development Forum, the ECOmeda Sustainability Summit and the Mediterranean Women Entrepreneurs Forum. During the gala dinner, **Jacek Krawczyk** was awarded a prize for his contribution to the development of the Euro-Mediterranean private sector. (lj)

### Sustainability in the 2020 European Commission Work Programme



by the EESC's Workers Group

**Digitalisation, climate change, demography and globalisation are the four issues dominating political priorities in the new term of the European Parliament and Commission. To tackle them a new, sustainable industrial model is needed that provides a fair transition towards a circular and green economy. Past experiences (such as the *gilets jaunes*) teach us that these urgently-needed measures will not gain popular support if they disregard workers and if they alone bear the burden.**

An overarching strategy that empowers citizens and workers, ensures sustainability and protects fundamental rights is needed. Advancing towards an inclusive future means that **the EU must develop legally-binding instruments** ensuring a **minimum income** level, providing a floor for **living minimum wages**, and **common frameworks for unemployment insurance**.

For this purpose, social investments (in health, education, social inclusion and green transition) should be excluded from the Stability and Growth Pact by means of a **golden rule**, ensuring the proper development and implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and the sustainability of public finances. Sustainability efforts must consequently always include social, economic, and environmental dimensions and the **burdens and responsibility must be distributed accordingly**, particularly regarding **taxation**. **Social dialogue**, the involvement of the **social partners** in policy-making, and respect for **collective bargaining and workers' rights** are fundamental tools to achieve this just transition that leaves no one behind. (prp)

### New role models for societies in Europe

By the EESC's Diversity Europe Group

As gender equality is set as a priority of the President-Elect of the European Commission and the **EU Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Caregivers** enters into the transposition phase, it is vital to review the interactions between gender equality, work-life balance, parenting, contemporary families, carers, assistance to disabled family members, ageing and demographics.



To look into the interactions between these issues, on 12 November the EESC's Diversity Europe Group held a high-level conference on ***New role models for societies in Europe***, which was moderated by **Ralph Sina**, Director of the WDR/NDR Studio in Brussels.

Speakers included **Virginija Langbakk**, director of the European Institute for Gender Equality, **Annemie Drieskens**, President of COFACE Europe, and **Dominique Boren**, former President of the Network of European LGBTIQ\* Family Associations (NELFA).

One solution proposed by **Arno Metzler**, President of the Diversity Europe Group, was the establishment of a **European Family Parliament**, where all stakeholders could network and exchange best practices.

The presentations given by the speakers are available [here](#)

## Soon in the EESC/Cultural events

### Photography and film to end the EESC's 2019 cultural activities



**A photo exhibition depicting one of Croatia's major industrial heritage sites and a thought-provoking film where different is the new normal will close the EESC's 2019 cultural programme.**

The EESC is currently hosting a photography exhibition linked to its work in the field of industrial change. ***The Industrial Heritage of the town of Sisak - Past & Present***, curated by Sisak's city museum and its photo gallery "Siscia Obscura", features a series of photos of this Croatian town seen through the lens of renowned Croatian photographers. The exhibition, which was organised by the EESC Employers' Group and officially launched by the Group President on 27 November, will be on display in Foyer 6 until the end of the year.

To mark the **International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2019**, on **19 December** the EESC will host a screening of ***Downside Up!***, a wordless short film about "being different" that has won several international awards. The **artistic director of Theatre Stap**, a Belgian theatre company working with actors with disabilities, and the lead actor of the film will attend the screening and exchange views with the audience in a debate around the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and its compliance with the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. The film screening is being organised by the EESC'S Communication Department and its Committee for Equal Opportunities (COPEC). (ck)

### Editors:

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

### Coordination:

Agata Berdys (ab)  
Katerina Serifi (ks)

### Contributors to this issue:

Chrysanthi Kokkini (ck)  
Daniela Marangoni (dm)  
David Gippini Fournier (dgf)  
Isabelle Henin (ih)  
Jasmin Kloetzing (jk)  
Laura Lui (ll)  
Leszek Jarosz (lj)  
Katerina Serifi (ks)  
Marco Pezzani (mp)  
Pablo Ribera Paya (prp)  
Silvia M. Aumair (sma)

### Address:

European Economic and Social Committee  
Jacques Delors Building,  
99 Rue Belliard,  
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel. (+32 2) 546.94.76  
Email: [eescinfo@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:eescinfo@eesc.europa.eu)

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