

[The Grassroots view - Episode 4: The long and winding road to accessibility](#)



With the new EU disability agenda in the pipeline, in episode 4, *The long and winding road to accessibility*, we discuss the employment situation of people with disabilities. We talk about what the EU should do to make its workplaces more inclusive – not only in the physical world but also in the collective mind-set of a society that almost inevitably fails to see the person other than through their disability.

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Frank Sioen and **Alba Gonzalez**, both persons with disabilities, tell us about the hurdles and obstacles they had to overcome to get and keep a job. **Mark Priestley**, professor of Disability Policy at the University of Leeds, explains how the right of people with disabilities

to work has evolved in European laws and policies over recent decades. And EESC member **Yannis Vardakastanis** discusses what practical measures the EU's disability strategy for the coming decade should contain to make accessibility a reality in Europe.(II)

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Editorial



Not a battle of numbers, but a battle of visions

Dear readers,

In the last EU summit in February, leaders were expected to make substantial progress towards reaching an agreement on the long-term budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework. But they failed to come to a compromise because of deep divisions.

If no agreement is reached, we risk yet another paralysis, which we cannot afford in the current geopolitical situation.

The urgent priorities awaiting the EU and the risk of post-Brexit talks cannot drag on as they will absorb energy for other priorities: the migration package, the Green Deal, the digital transition, the environmental transition, to quote just a few.

It is time to find the courage to make the right choices.

This is not a battle of numbers, but a battle of visions. The vision of the new Commission - "A Union that Strives for more" - and the new Strategic agenda that EU leaders set in Sibiu, reasserted during the European Councils of July and December 2019, must be fulfilled by decisions consistent with the new MFF.

You cannot decide to refurbish a house without ensuring the right budget.

I can only express our full support for what has been said by the EP President, Mr Sassoli, unanimously confirmed by all the political groups of the Parliament in a joint letter. Indeed, there is still a difference of €230 billion at the moment. The Council's proposal is far from acceptable.

If we want to initiate an ambitious European agenda, then there is no secret: the EU needs sufficient resources .

We expressed this position over a year and a half ago in an opinion adopted by an overwhelming majority and have reiterated it on many occasions.

If Member States are not willing to pay more for meeting ambitious priorities that they have already agreed upon and approved, they have to free up consistent own-resources. We must finally achieve what has been discussed over the past 15 years. We must deliver what the European public asked for in the last European elections. Europeans deserve respect and their vote should be heard, not ignored!

I believe it is time to be consistent and mobilise all forces available. It is time to take action and put pressure on our countries,

so that our governments find the courage, the political will and the necessary ambition to follow suit on what they have already agreed.

In this delicate phase, I believe that we should be vocal and strongly united in our positions, together with the European Parliament.

Luca Jahier

EESC President

Diary Dates

29-30 April 2020, Brussels

EESC plenary session

Please note that due to the COVID-19 outbreak, we are unable to schedule events until 29 March 2020.

In short

[The EU should get tough on fake news](#)



Regulating social media, developing media literacy and supporting independent quality journalism - these are some of the main prerequisites for combating disinformation and safeguarding EU democracy, says the EESC

The European Economic and Social Committee held a public hearing to explore the impact of campaigns to boost voter turnout in the latest European elections and to analyse opportunities for fighting disinformation and ensuring that the public participates more in political decision-making in the EU over the next five-year institutional cycle.

The hearing revealed that Europeans had become increasingly exposed to an avalanche of fake news, poor quality journalism favouring sensationalism over impartial reporting, and social media content that was filtered to suit various commercial or political interests.

The hearing was held to gather input for the EESC's exploratory opinion on the effects of campaigns on participation in political decision-making, for which **Marina Škrabalo** is rapporteur.

Apart from representatives from the EU institutions and the Croatian EU Presidency, the hearing brought together top officials from the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the

East Stratcom Task Force of the European External Action Service, the EU DisinfoLab, Carnegie Europe and European Digital Rights (EDRI).

The EESC opinion will be debated at the EESC plenary session in the spring. (II)

[EESC members visit Japan to talk trade and sustainable development](#)



Members of the European Economic and Social Committee's EU-Japan Follow-up Committee visited Japan to discuss the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and to strengthen cooperation with Japanese counterparts. The visit included a roundtable on the circular economy and the first EU-Japan Joint Dialogue with civil society under the EPA.

Eve Päärendson, president of the EU-Japan Follow-up Committee, commented: "The EU-Japan EPA is of major global importance".

Talking points included labour issues and the participation of women in the labour market, along with the potential of the circular economy to promote sustainable development.

Eve Päärendson welcomed the successful launch of joint EU-Japan civil society dialogue, saying it demonstrated the added value this kind of dialogue could bring in strengthening

ties between the two sides.(dgf)

[ECI Day 2020: activists call for "meaningful" public involvement in Conference on Future of Europe](#)



Looking back to their past experiences as organisers of European Citizens' Initiatives (ECIs), activists attending the ECI Day 2020 on 25 February warned against asking people what Europe they want and then ignoring their input.

The disappointments incurred by the first generation of ECI organisers, who went through the intricate process of initiating an ECI, collecting and validating one million signatures, then to be told that no action would follow, have taken a heavy toll, activists said.

The [new, simplified rules](#) in place since 1 January, coupled with better support for organisers such as the [overhauled ECI Forum](#), have helped alleviate "petition fatigue", sparking an impressive 16 new ECIs, [several of which](#) were actively collecting signatures at the event.

However, it is imperative to avoid making the same mistake again with the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#).

The ever more insistent demand by people to have a say not only in setting the EU's agenda, but in decision-making itself, can no longer be ignored.

A poll conducted at the event showed that **a large majority of participants thought it was vital for citizens' input to have a real impact on EU decisions beyond elections.**

67% believed citizen participation at European level must always have a clear link to the formal decision-making process.

69% agreed that rather than being one-off exercises, conferences such as the one on the future of Europe should take place regularly and have proper follow-up.

71% said that in addition to the Conference, a citizen-initiated convention should explore the future of citizen participation and democratic reform. It should start and end with an EU-wide people's vote.

In addition, 85% thought ongoing ECIs should be given prominence in the online multilingual platform that the European Commission is going to set up as the go-to resource for people wishing to know more about the Conference.

The role of digital technologies in the future of democracy, and specifically in the Conference on the future of Europe, spurred a passionate debate.

EESC President **Luca Jahier** reasserted the lasting value of representative democracy and of intermediary bodies while emphasising the EESC's unwavering commitment, over the years, to the success of the ECI, seen as a valuable complement to representative democracy.

Dubravka Šuica, EC Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, responsible for the Conference on the Future of Europe, stressed the Commission's resolve to *"be on the side of open, yet well-regulated technology"*, embracing its democratic potential (openness, responsiveness, transparency, availability) while warding off the dangers (manipulation and data security).

The results of the survey, which do not reflect the EESC's views but those of the participants in the ECI Day, are available [here](#) along with detailed information about the event. (dm)

[The European Parliament must insist on a strong EU budget for 2021-2027](#)



The EESC has forcefully reiterated its call for a Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of 1.3% of EU-27 gross national income for the period 2021-2027. This call comes at a crucial moment on the path to an agreement on the EU's next long-term budget, with the European Council still trying to establish its position.

During an ECO section debate in February on the state of play of the MFF negotiations with **Johan Van Overtveldt**, chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets, EESC members called on Parliament to stick up for an **ambitious EU budget**. Against the current backdrop of geopolitical and economic uncertainties, global megatrends, societal challenges and the new European Green Deal, the European Union needs to adopt a strong budget that reflects its intended actions.

ECO section president, **Stefano Palmieri** said: *"It is crucial to have a coherent MFF post-2020 able to face the new challenges for the EU: the new Green Deal, changes brought about by the digital economy and the importance of maintaining an effective cohesion policy."*

Now more than ever, the EU needs a credible and ambitious new budget to be able to deliver on the expectations of the people, said EESC members.

Mr Van Overtveldt said that it was uncertain how Parliament's unity regarding support for the call for 1.3% of GNI would evolve during the negotiations with the Council. He said: *"I can certainly say that it is the **firm intention of the European Parliament to have a tough negotiation** on where [the] compromise eventually will be"* Notwithstanding, Parliament would **insist on a contingency plan**, as "no deal" before 1 January 2021 could not be ruled out, which would have adverse effects on the timely start of the new programmes.

Lastly, speakers urged the heads of state and government to reach, as soon as possible, an agreement at the European Council to which the European Parliament could give its consent.

Read the [EESC opinion](#). (jk)

[EESC promoting Europe's green future](#)



The EESC will support the Commission's drive to match aspirations with actions in order to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and to put sustainability at the heart of our individual and collective responsibility. At the plenary session held in Brussels on 20 February 2020, EESC president Luca Jahier backed this year's European Commission work programme and its focus on sustainable development for a greener Europe.

Speaking in a debate with **Maroš Šefčovič**, the European Commission's vice-president for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight, **Mr Jahier** pointed out that the EESC welcomed the driving force behind the first Commission work programme, leading the transition to a fair, climate-neutral and digital Europe. "*We fully support the European Green Deal as a key driver for change and therefore the EESC would be willing to set up a permanent dialogue on sustainable development,*" he declared.

Mr Šefčovič was pleased to note that the main priorities of the 2020 Commission work programme corresponded to those identified by the Committee, namely the twin digital and climate transitions, the challenges of demographic change, and the need to ensure that our businesses and industry can continue to innovate and compete in a more challenging global environment. "*The 2020 work programme will not only form the basis of our work for the first year of the mandate, but will also set its vision, direction and pace for the next five years and beyond. It is an ambitious programme, with 43 policy objectives or packages,*" he highlighted. (mp)

[Disability strategy for the next decade: EU should lead the way in promoting progressive policies](#)



The European Economic and Social Committee held a high-level conference at which it brought together leading actors in disability policy to discuss the EU's new strategy in the field, a strategy which is in the making and is expected to have a profound effect on millions of EU citizens with disabilities in all spheres of life over the next decade.

The aim of the conference on Shaping the EU agenda for disability rights 2020-2030 was to present the EESC's recommendations and proposals for the new strategy, but also to offer a platform for exchange and input that will form part of the extensive consultations contributing to its preparation and finalisation by the European Commission in the early months of 2021.

With the new Commission and Parliament and the new budget programming period, this is an ideal moment for shaping a new strategy for people with disabilities. With the delivery of its opinion, the EESC was the first institution to contribute to the debate the Commission has opened on this topic, said the EESC's vice-president for Communication, **Isabel Caño Aguilar**, opening the conference.

Presenting the EESC's proposals, the rapporteur for the EESC opinion, **Yannis Vardakastanis** (shown in the photo), who is also the president of the European Disability Forum, said the new agenda should be much more comprehensive and ambitious than the one currently in place.

The EESC called for the new strategy to be fully aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Full implementation should be ensured by putting pressure on Member States, through the European Semester, to develop disability strategies of their own.

Mr Vardakastanis stressed the importance of giving a voice to disability organisations when it came to designing and implementing policies under the disability agenda.

The Commissioner for Equality, **Helena Dalli**, said the Commission would base the new agenda on the results of the ongoing evaluation of the current strategy, bringing greater fairness to the daily lives of citizens with disabilities.

The Commission expects to complete the evaluation of the current strategy by July 2020 and, on the basis of the draft agenda, to then hold formal consultations on the new strategy, to be conducted by the Commission in cooperation with other institutions and partners. Once all the feedback has been collected, it will issue the Communication on the new disability strategy within the first three months of 2021. (II)

[EESC and ILO intensify efforts to shape the future of work tailored to our values](#)



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has held a debate with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the future of work and the European Pillar of Social Rights, with the purpose of exploring further avenues for cooperation and stepping up efforts to make the rapidly changing world of work fair, decent and inclusive for the generations to come.

The debate was held in Brussels at the plenary session of the EESC, the EU body representing Europe's civil society. The EESC welcomed the ILO's Director-General **Guy Ryder**, who presented the ILO's [Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#).

After congratulating Guy Ryder on the 100th anniversary of the ILO, EESC president **Luca Jahier** expressed his organisation's commitment to the ongoing discussions on the future of work.

Addressing the plenary, **Mr Ryder** said that the ILO had set itself the task of working out how to shape a future of work in accordance with our values, in a context where fear is commonplace when people consider their futures at work.

He said the Centenary Declaration bore many similarities to the European Pillar of Social Rights. He stressed the importance of protecting the place of collective bargaining, and believed that the EESC had a pivotal role to play in this. He also contemplated the impact that EESC opinions could have on global employment and social standards and on cooperation with non-EU countries.

Concerning the European Green Deal, **Mr Ryder** said that the transition to carbon neutrality in 2050 was "*not about designing the future for people, but with them*".

Looking forward to further cooperation between the EESC and the ILO, EESC members and **Mr Ryder** then exchanged views about major challenges to the economy.

Shortly before the plenary session, the EESC's Vice-president for Communication, **Isabel Caño Aguilar**, opened an exhibition on "*100 years of Social Protection with the ILO*". (II)

[Advocators of EU rules for a transparent food chain address EESC plenary](#)



At its latest plenary session, the European Economic and Social Committee welcomed the instigators of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "[Eat Original. Unmask Your Food](#)", which is calling on the European Commission to impose mandatory origin labelling for all food products in order to prevent fraud and guarantee consumers' right to information.

The ECI "Eat Original. Unmask Your Food" had collected 1.1 million signatures in all 28 Member States by 2 October 2019, the end of the collection period.

Paolo di Stefano, head of the EU Liaison Office of Coldiretti, the main Italian farmers' organisation, which coordinated the initiative, said: "*This was long awaited, and it proves that EU citizens want to know what they are really eating*".

EESC President **Luca Jahier** said: "*This ECI is of particular interest to the EESC, which has set out its views on the subject in several opinions, strongly supporting clearer rules and better information for consumers, recommending greater transparency in labelling food origins.*"

The problem facing the EU is that, at this stage, origin labelling is only compulsory for certain foods, but voluntary for all others, which leaves large information gaps.

Mandatory indication of origin on food labels helps prevent falsification and unfair commercial practices.

Those behind the initiative believe that this much-needed harmonised legislation would increase food safety and transparency throughout the food supply chain, as the system has been so clearly shown to be vulnerable without mandatory origin labelling in place.

The EESC opinion on [Promoting healthy and sustainable diets in the EU](#), adopted in February 2019, went even further, recommending broader food labelling, including on environmental and social aspects. (mr)

[EESC ready to team up with European Commission on new pact on migration and asylum](#)



A new agreement on migration is urgently needed at European level and, to this end, the EESC is ready to support the Commission's ongoing efforts. The EESC president, Luca Jahier, speaking in Brussels on 3 March 2020, made it clear that migration was a priority for the EESC, as demonstrated by the fact that the Committee had been very active in this area for many years. "The EU needs to take prompt action towards drawing up a new pact on migration and asylum, as well as working together with the Member States on integration. We need to establish a genuinely common asylum procedure that is reliable, flexible and efficient," he said.

Speaking at the debate organised by the EESC Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) on the same day, **Ylva Johansson**, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, highlighted the Commission's current work in the area of migration and asylum and its intention to revive EU policy-making through a new agreement. "We need a new pact on migration and asylum, first of all because the most vulnerable depend on it, and secondly because our economy and society benefit from legal migration: our welfare systems need to be sustainable in the long term and our companies need skilled people," she said.

She then pointed to the importance of increasing trust and overcoming differences between Member States, so that national governments could find a common way ahead. "We need to be clear that migration is something normal. Each year, between 2 and 2.5 million people come to the EU: 140 000 of these arrivals are irregular – the equivalent of 5%. That means 95% of people are arriving in an orderly, monitored and managed way," she maintained. (mp)

[EESC adopts position on economic priorities for 2020](#)

In February, the EESC adopted its opinions on the European Commission's Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020 ([ECO/502](#)) and on its recommendations for the economic policy of the Euro area ([ECO/503](#)). The opinions represent its contribution to the debate on the economic priorities for the year ahead and beyond, which will be formally adopted



by the European Council in March.

The Committee welcomes the approach taken in the strategy, the inclusion of the SDGs, the stronger focus on long-term objectives and the investment indications. It also appreciates the fact that social rights are highlighted and calls for special attention to be given to the issue of gender.

The EESC urges EU Member States to make sustainable economic growth the top priority for European and national economic policies in 2020 and beyond. In its view, the European Green Deal represents not only a major shift for EU economies, but also an opportunity to enhance economic prosperity and convergence within the euro area and the EU as a whole. The Green Deal should become the backbone of future EU and euro area economic policy and lead to a new economic paradigm. Economic priorities should therefore be aligned with it.

Achieving the Green Deal and sustainable growth will require reforms and investment. The EESC believes that the funding proposed for the Just Transition Fund and Mechanism will not be sufficient. It proposes that the financial resources for these tools be increased and calls for additional **measures to ease and enhance private and public funding.**

The Committee also recommends complementing the current accommodative monetary policy of the ECB with a **cautiously aggressive fiscal policy at euro area level.** A balanced interplay between economic policy and the different pillars of EMU should be ensured and the **"golden rule"** for public investment be adopted.

Ensuring financial market stability by implementing the remaining key elements for completion of the Banking Union and Capital Markets Union and tailoring a **tax system** fit for future needs is also important, according to the EESC.(jk)

[Europe's sustainable future depends on accessibility of raw materials for batteries](#)



The European Union needs to secure permanent access to raw materials as soon as possible in order to develop a strong battery industry for electric vehicles. The alarm was sounded on this issue at a debate held in Brussels on 5 February 2020 by the EESC Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN).

Widespread e-mobility, with zero CO₂ emissions, is the next key step towards making sustainable transport and climate neutrality happen. Nevertheless, only by having ongoing access to raw materials for batteries will Europe be able to move away from fossil-based fuels and embrace electrification.

Colin Lustenhouwer, rapporteur for last year's EESC [opinion](#) on batteries, pointed out that it was vital to raise awareness of the urgent measures needed and said: *"We must take immediate action. The accessibility of raw materials is an ongoing issue in an area where Europe has few resources and would like to guarantee supply. Electrification is the only solution for sustainable fuel and this requires batteries."*

The raw materials are not available in the EU to the extent needed and have to be imported. Lithium, nickel, manganese and cobalt mainly come from South America and Asia. This means that if the EU does not act, it will become increasingly dependent on third countries such as Brazil and China.

Pierre Jean Coulon, president of the TEN section, concluded: *"For our sustainable future, we need to consider the whole battery lifespan and equip ourselves with the resources needed. European businesses can only become a major player in battery development and deployment in the global market by taking a huge leap forward over the next few years."* (mp)

[A Silver Deal for Europe: EU and Member States should ensure quality long-term care](#)

An EESC report finds the situation in the live-in care sector in Europe to be unsustainable, with working conditions of carers bordering on sheer exploitation and care recipients struggling to find affordable and quality care. This state of affairs has emerged due to a lack of state support for the care industry and is a product of political neglect.

The EESC has published a [report on the future of live-in care work in Europe](#) which points to an urgent need for stronger state involvement and effective action at national and European level to regularise the precarious situation of both caregivers and care recipients in this booming sector.

With demand for long-term and live-in care work continuing to increase due to demographic change, the ageing of the European population and rising chronic health needs, the state will not only have to invest heavily in the care economy to subsidise it in the near future, but it will also have a crucial role in the regulation and professionalisation of care work, the report said.

Defining live-in carers as workers employed to provide care services to older and disabled people who live in private residences as care recipients, the report recaps the EESC country visits to the [United Kingdom](#), [Germany](#), [Italy](#) and [Poland](#), chosen on account of being both countries of origin and of destination of live-in care workers located across the EU.

The country visits and the report are a follow-up to the EESC's 2016 opinion on [The rights of live-in care workers](#), the first policy document at EU level to address the issue of their working conditions.

"People we talked to - whether they represented workers, employers or care recipients - shared a common critique of many of the structural problems of live-in care work. Their biggest reproach was that it functions through the exploitation of migrant and mobile women, and that this is not only unethical and shameful but also unsustainable," said EESC member **Adam Rogalewski**, who co-authored the report with Cambridge-based researcher **Karol Florek**.



The full report is available [here](#). (11)

News from the Groups

Business for Climate Neutral Europe - Making the most of the SDGs and the Green Deal



By the EESC Employers' Group

A growing number of European companies have already changed their mind-sets and, over and above the strictly business aspects, are now taking environmental and social aspects into consideration as well in their daily operations. To make the transition to a green economy a success, the EU needs to provide a level playing field for its companies, boosting competitiveness and investment.

These are some of the conclusions of the conference on *Business for Climate Neutral Europe - Making the most of the SDGs and the Green Deal*, held on 9 March in Split, Croatia.

"*Business is not the problem but part of the solution when we are talking about achieving climate neutrality and implementing the SDGs*", observed **Jacek Krawczyk**, president of the EESC Employers' Group, at the opening of the conference.

Gordana Deranja, president of the Croatian Employers' Association, underlined that the starting point differed among the countries, and even the regions, in the EU, something that had to be taken into account in greening the economy.

"*Progress in aligning the European economy with the SDGs will advance at different rates in the different EU countries, but this is a turning point, especially for the smaller economies*", remarked **Tomislav Čorić**, Croatian Minister of Environmental Protection and Energy.

The first discussion panel focused on how businesses integrated the Sustainable Development Goals in their daily operations. Participants agreed that sustainability and environment issues were having a growing impact on customers' decisions. Only those companies that adjusted to the new mind-set and treated the SDGs as an indispensable part of their business model would succeed in the future.

The second panel looked into the consequences of the European Green Deal for EU industry. The panellists concluded that the implementation of the European Green Deal had to go hand in hand with a level playing field for companies competing on the global markets.

The conference was organised jointly by the Employers' Group, the Croatian Employers' Association, UN Global Compact Network Croatia and the Faculty of Economics of the University of Split. (11)

The new EU Budget: A union that strives for less?



By the EESC Workers' Group

The ongoing Coronavirus threat and the refugee crisis, with the latest developments of this human drama now unfolding on the border between Turkey and Greece, have shown yet again how urgent it is to have a common European response to issues far beyond the capabilities of individual Member States. The European institutions need, now more than ever, not only to agree on EU-wide measures and strategies, but more fundamentally to back those initiatives with resources.

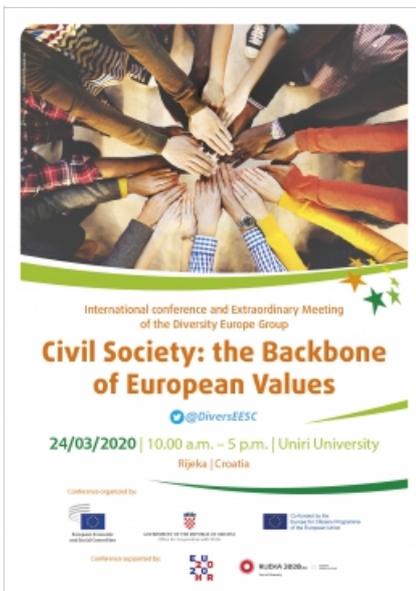
The motto of the new European Commission is 'a union that strives for more', with ambitious social, environmental and political goals. Proposals like the EU Minimum Wage and the European Green Deal aim at restoring public confidence in the Union, addressing pressing issues and ensuring that the industrial and green transition is approached in the most sustainable way, socially, economically, and environmentally speaking. In order to give these goals substance, the European Parliament has proposed that

Member States contribute 1.3% of their GNI to the budget, following recommendations by the EESC and the Committee of the Regions.

Yet these figures, which would constitute the bare minimum needed for achieving the programme, have been slashed in the Council: some Member States are attempting to cut the MFF (Multiannual Financial Framework) to 1% of Member States' GNI - well below even the modest Commission figure of 1.11%. This is likely to mean reductions of over 12% for cohesion measures and of 14% for the CAP, leaving the new, ambitious plans devoid of effective content.

Current proposed cuts to the MFF risk leaving the European Green Deal ineffective, jeopardising the fundamental cohesion efforts of the EU and leaving the Union and its Member States helpless in the face of common challenges. Now, more than ever, we need the European Parliament to stand its ground and Member States to remember that the European Union is about more than just the budget. As challenges multiply abroad and populism plays on inequality, some mainstream parties' attempts to play the moderate Eurosceptic in Europe does no one a favour. (prp)

Civic society: the backbone of European values



By the EESC's Diversity Europe Group

The EESC's Diversity Europe Group is organising a conference in Rijeka, Croatia, to discuss the role of civil engagement in tackling some of the major issues facing Europe today.

In recent years, the EU has been facing challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss, increased migration and shrinking space for civil society, which are potentially undermining its fundamental values in new ways.

On the other hand, the EU has also witnessed civic engagement. During these processes, many citizens across the EU have demonstrated their solidarity towards others and willingness to work towards sustainable lifestyles.

The EESC's Diversity Europe Group wishes to take up this subject and invite members and representatives of civic society to debate their role in the promotion and protection of European fundamental values such as human rights, democracy, equality and the rule of law.

The conference, entitled ***Civic society: the backbone of European values***, will take place in the coastal city of Rijeka, Croatia, European capital of culture 2020, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Rijeka.

The discussion will be divided into three panels. chaired by EESC members from Croatia belonging to the Diversity Europe Group.

The first panel, moderated by **Pavić-Rogošić**, will address the role of civic society organisations in protecting the key pillars of democracy: an independent judiciary and institutions, critical civil society and independent media.

During the next panel, the speakers and the public will discuss how the EU and civic solidarity stakeholders can work together on a sustainable response to intense global migration flows. The talks will be facilitated by **Marina Škrabalo**.

The last panel, moderated by **Toni Vidan**, will focus on the European Green Deal and the role of civil society organisations in developing and implementing this potentially transformative agenda for the EU.

The conference, originally scheduled for 25 March, has had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak . For updates please see: <https://bit.ly/2xsqqEY> (sb/cl)

Soon in the EESC/Cultural events

Singing a different tune: women in Europe's musical culture

To mark this year's International Women's Day on 8 March, the EESC is staging an exhibition entitled *Female Notes* which pays tribute to Europe's musical women.

The exhibition explores the social identity of female musicians from the sixteenth century to the present day through a series of biographical panels, honouring hundreds of female composers and musicians across Europe while also tracing the evolution of musical culture.

The exhibition is being held in collaboration with [Women's Toponymy](#), an Italian association which was awarded the EESC's 2019 Civil Society Prize for fighting gender disparities by naming places after notable women. (ck)



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