



Setting our priorities

Dear readers,

Almost ten months since Russia started the war in Ukraine, missiles continue hitting Ukrainian cities every day. Recent developments, including a deadly incident on EU soil, have reminded us of the constant security threat and the consequences of war. Against this backdrop, it is clear what our common EU priorities for the coming months should be.

The first priority is continuous support to Ukraine and its people, who are faced with extreme conditions. Damage to the water network and power cuts have left millions of people across Ukraine without proper access to safe water, electricity and heat. EU support and solidarity must continue.

Secondly: EU security and democratic values. I am reassured after Sweden's announcement that the security of EU citizens and safeguarding the EU's fundamental values are two of the core issues that will shape the political direction taken by the next presidency of the Council of the European Union. We must not let our security or our values be affected as we stand by Ukraine. European unity is crucial.

The other priorities include containing an unprecedented energy crisis and speeding up the green transition. Given the gloomy economic outlook for Europe, with inflation projected to reach 9.3% in the EU at the end of the year, we need to clearly set out the right priorities, rather than doing business as usual. Ensuring a recovery and supporting businesses and people confronted with high inflation and high energy prices is of key importance for our economies and societies, as well as for our democracies.

Moreover, we cannot forget the need to strengthen the EU's competitiveness for the jobs of the future. As EU businesses struggle to find adequately skilled workers, while many of our young people cannot find a job, it is high time to start tackling

the skills mismatch. When it comes to global market competitiveness, we cannot afford to waste our EU human capital.

Another global priority is combating climate change. The EESC has been very vocal, through the opinions it has issued and the events it has hosted, about making the European Green Deal also a

social deal. Unfortunately, the social dimension remains underdeveloped. Social dialogue should be an integral part of the policies put in place in order to reach the 2050 climate policy targets.

Allow me to also highlight the importance of strengthening participatory democracy in Europe. With all of the challenges that lie ahead, I am deeply convinced that we will only be successful if we involve European citizens by default. The learnings and recommendations from the Conference on the Future of Europe must be followed up. The EESC is ready to play a central role as a hub for future citizen participation in Europe.

And last but not least, as we come to the end of 2022 – the Year of Youth – I want to once again thank all millennials and Generation Z for standing up for EU values and for their constant efforts in taking actions to build a better, inclusive and sustainable world. This is our common responsibility.

Christa Schweng
EESC President

DIARY DATES

14-15 December 2022, Brussels

EESC plenary session

21 December 2022, Brussels

[The way forward for the EU economy](#)

27-28 February 2023, Brussels

Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference 2023



TO THE POINT

In our column "To the point", we invite EESC members to highlight aspects of an opinion or initiative that they consider important. This time we asked **Michael McLoughlin**, author of an information report highlighting the issue of the equal treatment of young people in the



MICHAEL MCLOUGHLIN: FOR EQUAL TREATMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LABOUR MARKET

2022, the European Year of Youth, is drawing to a close. The EESC, in a report on the equal treatment of young people in the labour market, advocates for an approach based on meaningful policy change and youth engagement to ensure that the Year of Youth goes beyond a mere communication activity.

During the year the EESC has taken the lead in proposing opinions based on the interests of young people and ways that the EESC itself could improve youth engagement.

As part of this process, the EESC has been drawing up a report on [The equal treatment of young people in the labour market](#). This aimed to examine a number of practices and rules, often at national level, that

treat young people less favourably in the labour market, particularly in relation to minimum wages, social security and health and safety, based solely on their age.

Drawing on information from Eurofond, the European Youth Forum, the ILO and the Mutual Information System on Social Protection, the opinion set out the details on some of these issues. Young people are particularly dependent on the minimum wage, with more than 1 in 4 being minimum wage earners, compared to 1 in 10 adults, according to the European Youth Forum. A number of Member States set specific "youth minimum wages", which are in all cases lower than the general minimum wage for particular age groups, while others exclude under 18s from minimum wage legislation.

Another area where there can be differential treatment of young people is during periods of unemployment. Once again, these are largely Member State competences, particularly when it comes to payment rates, pay-out periods, and criteria. There is a high level of diversity and complexity among the national systems across Europe. However, we can imagine instances where these differentials will impact on issues such as employment and free movement within the EU.

Young people may also be disadvantaged by unemployment benefit systems, as they may not have completed the required qualifying period of "paying in" to the relevant systems. Unpaid internships can be defined as periods of work, similar to those carried out by paid employees, that are not linked to a formalised and explicit process of education, training, volunteering or placement. There were a variety of different systems reported in different Member States with differing levels of oversight and regulation. The opinion highlighted the Resolution passed by the European Parliament, which is showing greater interest in this matter as a tangible symbol of commitment to the European Year of Youth.

IMAGINE UKRAINE...

In this edition's Imagine Ukraine column, we have a picture of the Antonovsky Bridge from August 2021, which was chosen by Ukrainian journalist, literary critic and essayist **Tetyana Ogarkova**. She was reminded of this picture a year later, on 11 November 2022, when the bridge was destroyed following the departure of the last Russian troops from the city of Kherson. Here is what she says about this photograph:

The Antonovsky Bridge in the Kherson region

"This picture of the Antonovsky Bridge dating back to August 2021 seems like it's from another life. It's the western bank of the Dnipro in Kherson, in southern Ukraine. We love our beautiful country and the wonderful Kherson region. It's 11 November 2022. Today is an unbelievable day. It is impossible to look at the Kherson bridge without crying. This strategic bridge has collapsed, but the city of Kherson has finally been liberated. There are so many places in the Kherson region that still need to be liberated. And everything needs to be rebuilt. But everything will work out. We believe in the armed forces of Ukraine, we support our defenders. One day we will come back to the Kherson region for good and the Antonovsky Bridge will be rebuilt and will stand again".





"ONE QUESTION TO..."

In this section, we publish the comments of EESC members on issues that are at the forefront of public debate and foremost in people's mind. This time we put a question to three members of the EESC delegation to the COP 27 summit on climate change, which took place in Egypt on 6-18 November 2022. **Sandra Parthie, Isabel Cano Aguilar** and **Neža Repanšek** answered the question: Did COP 27 in Egypt meet your expectations with regard to fighting global heating and saving the planet? In your opinion, are such major events uplifting or disappointing? What image of COP 27 has stayed most in your memory? (ehp)



SANDRA PARTHIE: COP27 – HAGGLING INSTEAD OF DOING

COP27, the United Nation's annual flagship climate negotiation event took place in Egypt this year. It broke several records – not least the one for the number of participants. Almost 35 000 people showed up in person – back to normality after two years of COVID-19 and public meeting restrictions.

The conference, originally convened to agree on proposals and solutions for how to tackle climate change and to find ways to mitigate and adapt to its consequences, has become more of an arena for highlighting the impact that changing climate is having on everyone, independent of where they come from and how they make a living. COP27 was overburdened by expectations and agenda items. As well as efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions, many different policy items were under negotiation, ranging from health to gender to human rights. Agriculture was also put on the meeting agenda for the first time. While this showcased the worrying impact that land and forest degradation is having on our food systems and farmers' livelihoods, it also added another dimension to an already overly complex problem.

The final result, achieved after the conference ran into 36 hours of overtime, delivers more on climate justice and less on climate action. A positive surprise was that an agreement was reached on a "loss and damage" fund, i.e. financial support to compensate for environmental damage and degradation incurred or being incurred because of climate change in the most vulnerable developing countries. This topic had been waiting in the wings of the climate conference for almost a decade before it was finally put on the agenda at this year's COP.

Less, or more to the point, no progress was made with regard to stronger climate action, i.e. more effort and commitments by countries to reduce their CO₂ emissions. An attempt by the European Commission's negotiators to link their support for the loss and damage fund to concessions by large polluters, namely China, to significantly reduce their emissions, fell flat. There was even a high risk of countries backsliding behind the goals already agreed under the Paris Agreement from 2015

and from last year's COP26 in Glasgow.

The "implementation COP", as the meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh was billed, risked actually undoing a lot of the progress achieved previously, essentially threatening to unravel the agreed goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees. Countries haggled over the status of China (Is it really still a developing country?), over the phasing out or phasing down of all fossil fuels or just of coal, over the strings attached to funds and technologies, etc.

This dynamic very much raises the question of whether the format is still fit for purpose. The main goal – to

come to a global agreement on the need to reduce CO₂ emissions – was achieved at COP21 in Paris. How to implement it, i.e. what methods to use for counting emissions or for verifying reduction, or what entities should be responsible for that and where they should be located, are very technical matters that perhaps should not be negotiated between ministers of almost 200 countries, especially if every conference starts from square one on any topic not to the liking of some parties. Rather, implementation should be dealt with on a technical, working level, not with heads of states and government meeting annually, but with parties coming together at longer intervals, whenever new agreements are needed to advance the work.

So, COP27 in Egypt did not live up to expectations in terms of more concrete or ambitious climate action, though it did move ahead somewhat in the area of climate justice. But it was very successful in being a platform for convening climate, human rights and environmental activists, showcasing climate action, or the lack of it, and in continuing to raise awareness of the real and present dangers of climate change.



ISABEL CAÑO: COP 27 — TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT

I went to this COP feeling strongly that matters were urgent and time was running out. COP 27 was pivotal, the conference which would make the shift from goals to action, which would start putting all those fine-sounding statements into effect.

Reality stubbornly reminds us, all day and every day, that global warming is happening and we are failing to do anything about it.

The international community has been unable to pull together over the last few years: this is clear from the lack of political will and the failure to deliver tangible solutions such as a proper loss and damage fund - despite the fact that the most vulnerable countries and those hit hardest have been calling for it for years.

This COP finally managed to achieve this objective, even if we are still in the dark as regards quite how it will be implemented.

After lengthy and complicated discussions, the COP established a working programme on a just transition based on social dialogue and social protection, as trade unions and the European Economic and Social Committee have consistently advocated.

However, we must bear in mind that there can be no climate justice without human rights, and labour rights are very much a part of them. There was a lot of talk about rights at Sharm el-Sheikh. Civil society, the major organisations, trade unions and some governments called out Egypt for its poor human rights record.

We should also be thinking about how COPs, and international climate policy itself, are organised: should they be reformed, shouldn't we be listening more to civil society, the social partners, young people and women and giving them a stronger voice at the table when it comes to decision making?

In terms of what the COP actually achieved, yes, we must acknowledge that it was lacking in ambition given the sheer scale of the climate emergency. We took part, unable to believe our ears, in discussions on issues that should have been taken for granted, such as the 1.5°C target and cutting the use of fossil fuels more rapidly - but which failed to tackle how to finance these measures.

And yes, men are still ruling the roost in climate negotiations, both because there are more of them and because they are in the top positions. Women have to play a part in decisions on the climate; their absence exacerbates inequality and prevents women from contributing more fully to shaping and implementing

climate policies.

The clock is ticking and COP 27 has made it quite clear that despite some progress, we still have a lot of work to do.



NEŽA REPANŠEK: TOGETHER WE CAN BREAK DOWN THE WALLS OF FEAR

When I entered the COP27 registration hall in Sharm el Sheik, I was utterly overwhelmed. Overwhelmed by people, events, diversity, and all the noise. Can you imagine thousands of people speaking simultaneously, but nobody listening? It is difficult to describe.

Maybe it would be best to use the biblical symbolism of the Tower of Babel, where when building the tower, people suddenly started to speak different languages, and they could not communicate and work together to build the tower. The challenges of working together for a common cause also arose at this year's COP. Thousands of people, each with their own agenda and unique focus, talked to like-minded people in their social bubbles. Formal negotiations were somehow overshadowed by a circus-like fair, where it was difficult to even find an event location due to lack of time or distance to the location. Getting into dialogue had to be planned in advance, and only a few things could be left to chance.

Do we need this kind of event? Do they bring hope? In my opinion, events of this type could see logistical improvements. But since it is the only yearly event where so many diverse stakeholders meet and share the same reality, passion, and sincere concern for our future, I have to say that COP27 did bring hope. Maybe it was due to the collective experience

of hot November weather, overpriced food in the first week, or late-night meetings. It could be the stories we heard and shared with people from all over the globe. It could be the realisation that loss and damage due to climate change are already happening everywhere, and the question of whether or not to act is no longer a question.

Being part of the YOUNGO constituency and a party delegate, despite the noise, the circus-like arena, and the plethora of events, just after the Peoples' Plenary I had a revelation: if you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything.

The climate change fight will never be won in the negotiation room, but only on the ground, with our common cause. Together we can break down the walls of fear, like drops of water that join into rivers that can shape canyons and move mountains! We must build alliances, ensure visible democratic participation, and respect human rights and dignity.

We cannot repeat the same thing and expect a different result. If we don't do anything, it will cost us the Earth. So finally, it is time to quit the "too little too late" narrative, make a giant, ambitious leap of faith and ensure the true commitment of the parties to respect the decisions taken at the Sharm El-Sheikh COP27.

NEW PUBLICATIONS



[The surprise guest](#)

Every month in this column we introduce a public figure whose work and commitment are a source of inspiration. Their courage, strength of character and determination to take action set a shining example and their bravery deserves all our respect.

Today our guest is **Tikhon Dzyadko**, a Russian independent journalist, television presenter and media manager. He is the editor-in-chief of TV Dozhd (TV Rain), the only independent TV station in Russia, which is now based in Europe.

Tikhon Dzyadko started his career working at the independent radio station "Echo of Moscow". From 2007 to 2012 he was a Russia correspondent for the international organisation Reporters Without Borders. For a while he was also deputy editor-in-chief and host of the RTVI channel. He joined TV Dozhd in 2010 when it was first created and

became its editor in chief in 2019. In March 2014, he signed an appeal against the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea. In March 2022, TV Dozhd was blocked by the Russian government. Journalists working at the station, including **Tikhon Dzyadko**, went abroad and have been continuing their journalistic activities outside Russia. (ehp)



[Tikhon Dzyadko: Russian propaganda has the face of war criminals](#)

Meet our Surprise Guest Tikhon Dzyadko in a brief but sharp interview!

EESC info: When did you decide that you could no longer work in Moscow? Was it your decision to leave Russia, or did you not have a choice?

Tikhon Dzyadko: Like many other journalists, we were forced to leave the country. Following the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the Russian government imposed military censorship. New legislation was adopted meaning you could get up to 15 years in jail for even calling the war by its

name, rather than a "special military operation".

So in order not to go to jail and at the same time continue my work as a journalist, I was forced to leave the country.

Where are you working now?

TV Dozhd has three studios in three different locations: in Riga, in Tbilisi and in Amsterdam. I am based in Amsterdam.

How would you describe Russian propaganda?

Russian propaganda is very dangerous because it is organised and controlled by war criminals. Russian propaganda has the face of war criminals. They have been fuelling this war for many years by telling people lies.

What do you expect from the European Union?

I think the EU and its people should understand that there are a lot of Russians who are opposed to this war and support Ukraine and Europe.

What would you like to do in the future and where?

Go back to Moscow and continue working from there.

EESC NEWS



[#COP27: European civil society urges EU institutions and Member States to step up climate ambition](#)

A few days ahead of COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, the EESC adopted a resolution on "Jointly tackling an existential threat: social partners and civil society for the implementation of ambitious climate action". The message of European organised civil society was clear: we need the EU institutions and Member States to keep playing their leadership role and step-up their climate ambition, regardless of what other regions of the world do.

A clear majority of Europeans - 70 % - are alarmed by climate change, and almost three-quarters believe they need to do more personally to help the green transition, according to a Eurobarometer survey. The EESC, through its resolution and its 7-strong delegation in Sharm El-Sheikh, called on all stakeholders involved to act on citizens' concern and step up climate ambition in accordance with the latest scientific recommendations.

The EESC was represented by its members **Peter Schmidt, Isabel Caño Aguilar, Sandra Parthie, Josep Puxeu Rocamora, Neža Repanšek** and **Lutz Ribbe**, rapporteurs for the resolution, and by youth climate activist **Sophia Wiegand**.

"Climate change is one of the biggest challenges faced by humanity in this century. Its impact will not start with our children but already with ourselves, changing dramatically the way we live", said **Cillian Lohan**, EESC vice-president for communication and climate activist. "Of course, we know that the European Union is doing more than any other region, as the European Green Deal and the Fit for 55 package demonstrate. But as the home of European civil society, we need to press the European Commission and the EU Member States to maintain their leadership role and convince our global partners to follow Europe's example." (ks)



EESC's strategic partner role beefed up by new cooperation deal with European Commission

The EESC and the Commission have signed a new cooperation protocol which further consolidates and intensifies the political and legislative cooperation between the two organisations as well as their joint efforts to communicate about Europe. The protocol also strengthens the Committee's strategic function vis-à-vis the EU institutions and its role in promoting the values of European integration and participatory democracy.

The new protocol, which was signed on 27 October, gives the EESC a stronger role both in the implementation of the [European Citizens' Initiative](#) and within the [European semester](#), a key economic and fiscal policy tool.

"A significant new feature in the protocol is the commitment to jointly identify five subjects for exploratory opinions each year, once the Commission has adopted its work programme. This is a very important point for us, enabling us to work in a more forward-looking way", commented EESC president **Christa Schweng**. Exploratory opinions are drawn up at the request of the European Parliament, the European Commission or the Council of the EU on issues of great interest to civil society.

The Commission Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight, **Maroš Šefčovič**, said that "This revision of the Protocol will ensure that the ways we cooperate are more suited to the times we live in and the challenges we face. It also reiterates the important role the Committee plays in the development of our policies, with the synergies between us contributing to the smooth functioning of the EU". (tk)



[EESC proposes more measures to prevent abusive lawsuits against journalists and rights defenders](#)

In the [opinion](#) *Initiative against abusive litigation targeting journalists and rights defenders*, the EESC gave its support to the Commission's [proposal](#) to protect people from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). This includes journalists and rights defenders who are important contributors to debates on thorny issues.

The EESC approved the opinion at its plenary in October, and proposed expanding the list of measures to help curtail SLAPPs. Opinion rapporteur **Tomasz Andrzej Wróblewski** said: “If we do not strengthen the system, freedom of speech will be threatened.”

Co-rapporteur **Christian Moos** said: “It is an urgent, pressing political issue. We need action to defend journalists and people who speak out against abuse of power, against corruption.”

SLAPPs are used by certain powerful individuals, lobby groups, corporations and state bodies to silence journalists and others who contribute to public debate, like social activists, human rights defenders,

non-governmental organisations, whistleblowers in the broad sense, engaged citizens, and trade unions. These legal actions take advantage of gaps in judicial systems to put forward groundless criminal or civil lawsuits that prevent, restrict or penalise public participation by the targeted individuals or groups.

The EESC's proposals include introducing a preliminary ruling that would terminate proceedings found to be non-compliant, and consolidating proceedings in a specific jurisdiction at the request of the defendant. Other measures could also be considered, including setting a time limit or a means for fast tracking the procedure. Another suggestion is to exclude the possibility for a person other than the plaintiff to fund SLAPPs.

Reviewing national legislation would also help identify mechanisms that could serve to counter SLAPPs. A unified approach should be taken in both cross-border and national cases, and a review of national laws should be undertaken with a view to decriminalising defamation in the remaining Member States where it is still criminalised.

The EESC also suggests shortening the proposed time until the evaluation of the proposed SLAPP directive from five years to two years.

Finally, education and training are crucial. Legal professionals and participants in the public debate need to be trained to be able to react against SLAPPs and to be better able to defend freedom of expression. (II)



[Tackling the energy crisis: organised civil society calls for a realistic and pragmatic approach to the energy transition](#)

The EESC is committed and determined when it comes to decarbonising the EU's energy system and calls on EU policy-makers to tackle the consequences of decades-long energy dependence.

With these words EESC president **Christa Schweng** opened a debate on the EU's energy transition and strategic autonomy at the plenary session on 26 October 2022. The EESC was hosting professor **Leonardo Meeus** from the European University Institute in Florence.

"We need to work on a green transition at a pace that businesses and societies are able to keep up with and with accompanying measures that allow for Europe's global competitiveness and innovation," said **Ms**

Schweng. "The EU has the potential to reduce its dependence on imported energy by developing its local renewable energy capacity, but proper investment incentives must be ensured."

Professor Meeus referred to the EU electricity market reforms proposed by the European Commission, arguing that the electricity market we have built over the past 20 years can be part of our future, as long as we complement and combine it with new instruments to engage consumers and modernise networks.

The debate was linked to the adoption of the EESC opinion [A strategic vision on energy transition to enable the EU's strategic autonomy](#), drafted by **Thomas Kattinig**, **Lutz Ribbe** and **Tomasz Andrzej Wróblewski**.

The opinion sets out the EESC's vision on the energy transition and its role in achieving the EU's strategic autonomy, focusing on speeding up decarbonisation, reducing dependence on energy imports, increasing buy-in from communities and businesses and supporting vulnerable households. (mp)



[EESC calls for more health, housing and financial support for family caregivers](#)

The EU and Member States need to implement measures to improve the lives of those who provide long-term care for relatives with disabilities or with chronic or degenerative diseases, the EESC said in the own-initiative opinion [The role of family members caring for people with disabilities and older persons](#), adopted at its October plenary session.

The opinion's rapporteur, **Pietro Vittorio Barbieri**, said all measures should be taken jointly by policy-makers, employers (through social dialogue) and family caregivers and their representative organisations.

"The first step is recognising the value of their work and giving them a say in the assistance they provide. The second step is laying on housing services and support to prevent isolation, marginalisation and physical

and mental overload. Clearly, if countries can guarantee that certain services will be provided, it will take some of the load off family members".

Such measures include providing family caregivers with adequate health services, including preventive healthcare, along with training on how to look after their own health. Housing support and home services (in line with health and nursing needs) and psychological support for the caregiver and the family unit are also needed.

The EESC also calls for Member States to consider alternative forms of remuneration, including financial aid, for those family carers who risk impoverishment when they are forced to give up paid employment or reduce their working hours. Employers should also be encouraged to provide flexible working arrangements and fringe benefits beyond the minimum required under national rules for employees who provide ongoing care for relatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has probably worsened the situation for many family caregivers, but not enough up-to-date information is available on the scale of the issue, hampering efforts to address it. (II)



[EESC takes action to empower women on the job market and as entrepreneurs](#)

To mark the European Parliament's Gender Equality Week, the EESC adopted two opinions making recommendations on promoting women's empowerment and supporting family caregivers. The Committee also supported the Parliament's initiative with a series of events linked to gender mainstreaming and intersectionality.

Opening the debate, EESC President **Christa Schweng** said: "The current gender employment gap is unacceptable and represents significant economic and social damage for the EU. We must put in place a more favourable environment for women entrepreneurs, break down barriers and stereotypes, and find more role models for young girls and women."

European Parliament Vice-President **Evelyn Regner** stressed the need for gender mainstreaming and binding measures: "Progress has been slower than in previous years. But where binding measures are in place, we are still able to make some headway. We need to change the culture to fight against bias, but we also need binding measures. And we need to work together – EP and EESC, women and men, young and old."

Ozlem Yildirim, rapporteur for the [EESC opinion on Improving equality in the EU](#), called for "effective anti-discrimination policy at EU level, complete with truly dissuasive sanctions".

The co-rapporteur, **Cristian Pîrvulescu**, explained that "the opinion calls for the next generation of measures to promote equality in Europe to be developed, based on recognition of the principle of equality and of obligations to enforce it."

The Committee also adopted an [opinion on the role of family members caring for people with disabilities and older persons](#). The rapporteur for the opinion, **Pietro Vittorio Barbieri**, explained that "European welfare is based on family caregivers, who are often left out of the system. The vast majority of these are women who are forced to choose between providing care or continuing to work. We urge European and national institutions to investigate this phenomenon for the sake of caregivers and those being cared for." (gb)



[The EESC calls for a sustainable plant protein and plant oil strategy](#)

In an own-initiative opinion, the EESC highlights the many benefits of a green EU strategy for expanding plant protein and plant oil production and proposes an outline for that strategy. These benefits include reducing the EU's dependence on imports and contributing to the development of rural areas.

The EESC's practical recommendations for a proposed strategy are in line with the EU's aim to achieve strategic supply autonomy, the EESC stressed in the opinion, which was approved during its plenary in October.

Opinion rapporteur **Lutz Ribbe** said: "The EU is highly dependent on feed imports, with 75% of its high-protein plants sourced from abroad. The promotion of EU production of protein crops is essential and will also have a positive impact on biodiversity and the entire environment, as well as

helping farmers reduce their use of mineral fertilisers."

The many benefits of expanding plant protein and oil cultivation in the EU and increasing the role of grasslands in feeding animals include increased crop rotation, self-sufficiency in tractor fuel and greater availability of plant solids after processing, as these have excellent protein feed potential for livestock.

Overall, an EU strategy should take the interests of rural communities into consideration and contribute to sustainable rural development in line with the EU's long-term vision.

The EESC recommends that the European Commission take a close look at the Commission on the Future of Agriculture set up by the German federal government and consider whether this format might be appropriate for developing a European protein strategy. (ks)



[The EESC flags up the need for an EU action plan for cultural diplomacy](#)

A new EESC report suggests the EU should establish a fully-fledged multiannual strategic action plan to unlock the full potential of cultural diplomacy.

Even though culture as an instrument of the European Union's foreign policy has been on the agenda for the last 17 years, it has never been become a real priority. However, with war now back on the continent, culture needs more than ever to become a core strategic vehicle of the EU's foreign policy, stressed the EESC in the opinion.

"Culture could be a core asset in Europe's internal path, but also in the external image that the EU projects", said **Luca Jahier**, rapporteur for the opinion.

Mr Jahier particularly emphasises the importance of cultural heritage as a politically sensitive and highly complex subject, and hence a powerful and complementary diplomatic component of the EU's approach to peace, security and sustainable development.

A strong multiannual strategic action plan on cultural diplomacy should cover the protection, restoration and reconstruction of heritage in areas hit by natural disasters, crises and conflicts. It should also include a mapping of existing initiatives, leading to the creation of an EU platform for international cultural relations and a dedicated structure within the EU's External Action Service centred around an "EU Special Envoy for Cultural Relations".

The [own-initiative opinion on the role of cultural diplomacy](#), adopted at the EESC's October plenary session, highlights the significance of the cultural dimension in the current geopolitical context, something fully in line with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. (mt)



Mobility should be recognised as an individual right

In an own-initiative opinion adopted at the EESC October plenary session, the EESC called for mobility to be recognised as an individual right and as a public good that must be available to everyone.

The [EESC opinion](#), put together by **Kristina Krupavičienė** and **Dovilė Juodkaitė**, underlines that sustainable mobility can make the EU's green recovery a reality: environment- and user-friendly public transport could be a real driver of the post-COVID-19 recovery.

"The pandemic has acted as a catalyst, showing that public transport is an essential service in the public interest, especially when providing access to jobs and services for frontline workers and vulnerable groups," said **Ms Krupavičienė**.

According to the EESC, the EU needs strategies to upgrade mobility and improve public transport, making it more attractive and accessible to members of the public, especially those on low incomes.

Public transport can play a key part in Europe's post-pandemic recovery: it can help address climate concerns and at the same time improve quality of life by enabling people to work, enjoy a social life and access culture. However, achieving sustainable mobility requires strong political commitment from all actors and at all levels.

"We call on the European Commission to set measurable and ambitious targets to promote a switch from private car use to collective transport and active mobility, and encourage the European Union and the Member States to contribute to the shift towards greener modes of transport by making them more generally attractive," said **Ms Juodkaitė**. (mp)



[The EESC calls for more EU autonomy in energy, food, water and raw materials to better deal with emergencies](#)

The EESC has urged the Commission and Member States to develop a plan to increase the EU's preparedness for emergencies. In particular, the plan should increase the EU's sovereignty in energy generation, food and water production and the mining of raw materials.

With winter approaching and the cost of energy a concern for citizens, the EESC wants the EU to improve its resilience in order to cope with future crises.

An [own-initiative opinion](#) adopted at the October plenary session emphasised the EESC's belief that continuous improvements to increase the resilience of energy systems to natural, political or other emergencies

should be integrated into all energy policies.

This should encompass the whole production chain, including research and development, material processing, design, manufacturing, installation, start-up and maintenance of facilities within the EU single market. The autonomy would help to eliminate energy poverty and unemployment.

Opinion rapporteur **Paul Rübzig** also called for support for citizens and consumers who want to invest in their own energy production and efficiency: "We need information campaigns, tax incentives and subsidies and we have to build new transport infrastructure throughout the internal market, but also outside the European Union".

Going beyond this, the EESC called for critical supplies of materials such as copper, lithium, cobalt and rare earth elements to be secured through new single market mining and recycling strategies. It recommended safeguarding sources of oil, coal, gas, uranium, water, food and animal feed and developing plans for rationing energy, food, water and sanitation facilities. (dm)



[Digital Innovation Hubs can help SMEs get green and digital](#)

The EESC has recommended reinforcing Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) to boost the EU's innovation capacity as part of the transition to a sustainable future. DIHs provide valuable infrastructure for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that might otherwise struggle to become greener and more digital.

The EU is behind the US and Japan in terms of investment in research and development relative to GDP (2.32% in 2020, compared to 3.08% in the US and 3.2% in Japan).

The EESC believes that the EU should boost R&D investment to 3% of GDP and has set out several recommendations on how to best use [Digital Innovation Hubs](#) to this end in an [own-initiative opinion](#) approved at its

plenary session in October.

Opinion rapporteur **Giuseppe Guerini** said: "The digital transition affects the whole of European society, not only the economy. There is a direct impact on achieving the climate goals of the European Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but above all, there is a social impact in many areas."

Speaking on the importance of DIHs, co-rapporteur **Nicos Epistithiou** added: "Digital Innovation Hubs function as one-stop shops that provide guidance to SMEs on the digital and green transitions. Trade unions, civilian society organisations, employers' associations and public authorities need to work together within these hubs."

Digital Innovation Hubs are regional collaborations between different types of organisations. They serve as platforms for testing technological solutions prior to investment and can be used to exchange best practices and develop digital skills.

The DIH network in Europe is currently undergoing major restructuring but the EESC is concerned that there is a lack of clear vision on their future development. (ks)



[The EU needs a common response to address systemic shocks](#)

In two newly adopted opinions, the EESC gives updated views on the Commission's Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2022, which outlines the upcoming economic and employment policy priorities for the EU, as well as on the Recommendations on euro area economic policy for 2022. The EESC calls for a balanced approach that does not jeopardise the EU's social and environmental goals.

The EESC stresses that, with energy and food prices rising, a social safety net for the most vulnerable should be established; with inflation at an all-time high, the European Central Bank should analyse the side-effects of its monetary policy, for example on growth and employment, while regarding the increase in public debt, progress is needed on the reform of the Stability and Growth Pact.

"We call for a balanced policy approach, which must protect fairness and environmental objectives, particularly in times of crisis", comments **Judith Vorbach**, rapporteur for the additional [opinion on the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2022](#). "This approach is the basis for the EU's past, present and future prosperity and competitiveness, and for greater convergence and resilience".

Juraj Sipko, rapporteur for the additional [opinion on the Euro area economic policy 2022](#), adds: "We must work together to address the unprecedented systemic shocks that the world is currently facing. Delaying the adoption and implementation of measures may have far-reaching consequences, not only in terms of material loss, but also in terms of human life". (tk)



Galia Ackerman

[Enlargement, communication and energy top the agenda at the EESC's Connecting EU seminar](#)

The enormous challenges posed for Europe by Russia's aggression were the subject of the EESC's annual seminar for civil society communicators, entitled "[Geopolitical turmoil at Europe's door: the perspective of civil society](#)", which took place in Zagreb, Croatia, on 24 and 25 October 2022.

The European Union should not only support Ukraine in its daily life during the war, but it should also think about Ukraine's long-term reconstruction and path to EU membership, it was stressed at the seminar, organised in partnership with Croatia's Economic and Social Council (GSV).

The seminar featured three panels: on EU enlargement, communication in times of crisis, and energy.

In her opening speech in Zagreb, EESC President **Christa Schweng**, said: "Let's try to imagine Ukraine in a couple of years. I know it is difficult to view matters positively against the backdrop of constant news from the field, with missiles continuing to hit Ukrainian cities every day, inflicting damage on the water network and causing power cuts. Our thinking and our work today must be led by how we want to see the future of Ukraine. I see it as a reconstructed, prosperous country based on European values and allowing its citizens to return to decent lives in their home country."

"How did the West make a mistake about Vladimir Putin?" - **Galia Ackerman**, French-Russian writer, journalist, and historian, tackled this question in her keynote speech. In her opinion, Putin has been pursuing a hidden agenda since the beginning of his rule in Russia.

Nonetheless, some Westerners were not able to see Putin's goals, and some preferred not to. " KGB-trained Vladimir Putin has the mentality and the ethics of the KGB. And I agree that someone who is a product of the KGB could have the skills to deceive most of the world," said **Ms Ackerman**.

Speakers opening the event included Croatian Minister for Labour, Pension Systems, Family and Social Policy, **Marin Piletić**, head of the European Parliament Office in Croatia, **Violeta Simeonova Staničić**, Head of Media at the European Commission Representation Office in Croatia, **Andrea Čović Vidović** and Head of the Croatian Journalists' Association **Hrvoje Zovko**.

The three panel discussions were introduced by the president of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group **Seamus Boland**, the president of the EESC's Workers' Group **Oliver Röpke** and member of the EESC's Employers' Group and president of the EESC Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) **Aurel Laurențiu Plosceanu**.

The panel that opened the seminar, entitled "In the shadow of war: Europe's new geopolitical context and consequences for the future of the EU", focused on the impact of Russia's actions on the Balkans and on lessons for Ukraine regarding EU enlargement.

The West's struggle in the "battle of narratives" against Putin's Russia was one of the themes of the panel discussion on "Communication in times of crisis". Panel members stressed Russia's strong hand in sowing its propaganda outside Europe and North America and pointed to a growing need for professional and "volunteer armies" to combat disinformation techniques in Europe.

Severe problems in the energy market, compounded by the war, were the subject of a panel debate on "The energy revolution between the war and climate objectives, challenges to the Green Deal". On the agenda were challenges for the green transition, lessons from dependence on Russia (which now also apply to China) and the pros and cons of nuclear energy.

The seminar was also supported by the Office of the European Parliament and the European Commission's Representation in Croatia.

To find out more about the seminar, its programme, speakers, videos and photo gallery, please visit: <https://bit.ly/3iKZZIs> (II)

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS



Seminar with the participation of Commissioner Johansson: "EU economic migration policies: responding to labour market and skills needs"

By the EESC Employers' Group

Employers see a growing role for economic migration as part of the EU's overall policy mix for providing the skills and labour that European companies need in order to be competitive, productive and innovative. The role of economic migration as part of the EU's policy response for enhancing the availability of a skilled workforce is set against the backdrop of a declining working age population; stagnating intra-EU mobility and skills mismatches and labour shortages across a wide range of sectors.

The seminar: "EU economic migration policies: responding to labour market and skills needs" explored how the EU's economic migration policy can help to promote a more demand-led approach to migration. It considered the different tools, policy approaches and initiatives at EU, national and sectoral level that shape the role that migration plays in helping to address employers' skills needs.

The event was co-organised by BusinessEurope and the EESC Employers' Group on 7 November 2022. Speakers and participants included **Ylva Johansson**, Commissioner for home affairs, and representatives from the European Commission, Cedefop, EU and national social partners, national authorities, as well as EESC members.

At the event, EESC Employers' Group President **Stefano Mallia** emphasised the importance of economic migration: "In a situation where EU domestic workforce alone is not sufficient to keep the wheels of the European economy turning, the EU and Member States must continue to facilitate the migration of skilled workers from non-EU countries, and Member States should ensure that their national systems - for instance labour market tests - are built in a manner that facilitates addressing labour and skills shortages effectively."

Markus Beyrer, CEO of BusinessEurope agreed: "We call on the European Commission to make progress towards an EU expression of interest type of economic migration system to help Europe become more attractive to available talents globally. We look forward to contributing to shaping with the Commission the full version of the proposed talent pool, to make sure it is well aligned with employers' needs across Europe."

The discussions showed that cooperation and coordination between the EU, Member States and stakeholders (especially employers) is needed to ensure that the EU's economic migration policy can help to promote a more demand-led approach to migration. The EU Talent Pool can play an important role in helping to match migrants from non-EU countries with available job vacancies. The new EU Migration Platform on improving the governance of labour migration, outlined in the Skills and Talent Package, should improve cooperation and coordination between all relevant stakeholders. Given the importance of having well-functioning national migration policy frameworks, the Commission should identify opportunities for mutual learning and peer review on issues such as ensuring regularly updated shortage occupation lists and well-functioning labour market tests.

Find the full summary of the event here: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/news/eu-economic-migration-policies-responding-labour-market-and-skills-needs-0> (dv)

Strengthening workplace democracy

by the EESC Workers' Group

Earlier this month, the Workers' Group held a meeting to discuss a core issue for the trade union movement - democracy in the workplace. It is crucial that workers and their representatives are informed and consulted when it comes to decision-making within a company. Consultation promotes better pay and conditions for workers, which in turn increase productivity and workforce participation. Indeed, businesses that support democracy in the workplace perform significantly better and are more innovative. The ongoing green and digital transitions have underscored the urgent need to create a strong legislative framework that supports workplace democracy.

Oliver Röpke, President of the EESC Workers' Group, welcomed participants and outlined the impact the global pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have had on the European economy.

The event was then opened by **Aurelio Fernández López**, a member of the Spanish permanent representation to the EU, who assured the audience that democracy at work would be a key priority for the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Rolf Schmachtenberg, State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, gave the keynote speech. He explained how workers' participation and codetermination are the basis for Germany's economic success.



The second panel of the day concerned the role of workplace democracy in upholding labour standards in supply chains. Workers' Group member **Maria del Carmen Barrera Chamorro** drew on her opinion on decent work worldwide, which had recently been adopted. While she was supportive of the Commission's efforts in this area, she noted that current proposals exclude trade union and works council participation.

Summing up the debate, **Oliver Röpke** said that the afternoon's discussion would aid the EESC's ongoing work on the issue of workplace democracy, a subject that must be tackled by European trade unions working together in a joint endeavour. (lc)



[There will be no just transition to low-carbon societies without civil society involvement](#)

By the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Academia, local civil society organisations, representatives of regional and national authorities and members of the EESC met at a conference in Dolni Vítkovice, a former industrial area for coal mining and steel production in Ostrava, Czechia in October 2022. The conference on [Reinventing the Moravian-Silesian Region in search of a socially just transition](#) was organised by the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group as part of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU and attended by Anna Hubáčková, Minister for the Environment of the Czech Republic, Vladimír Špidla, former European Commissioner and EESC President, Christa Schweng.

Opening the conference, **Séamus Boland**, President of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group, stressed the urgent need for a just transition to climate neutral economies and for civil society actors to ensure that nobody was left behind. He said: "The European Green Deal and the EU digital transition are inter-dependent and central to the EU's strategy of geostrategic autonomy from Russia. But we need to scale down this big EU strategic vision to the local level. Because nothing will be achieved without getting on board local communities and civil society organisations. We must directly involve them in bottom-up processes, jointly developing creative and sustainable solutions for a sustainable future."

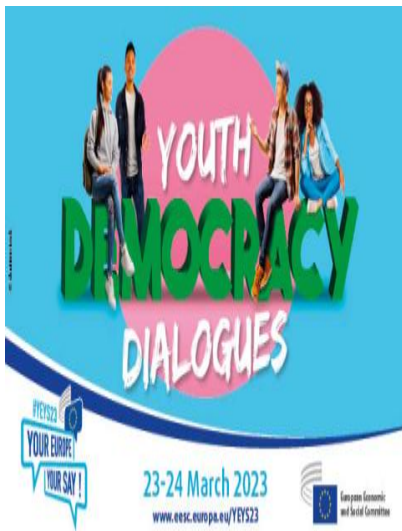
Mr Boland recognised the significant efforts made by the Moravian-Silesian region to transform itself into a sustainable and low-carbon region. He also emphasised the identity challenge stemming from the transformation of the steel heartland of the Czech Republic into a low carbon economy. The process would clearly entail a reinvention of the local identity.

One of the most important conclusions of this conference was that a socially just transition can only become reality by means of a resourceful toolkit of actions and measures: enhancing investment by guaranteeing continuous access to public and private funds; focusing on small projects, social services, infrastructure, innovation and research, agriculture, development and social cohesion; knowledge sharing across industries and sectors, and learning from best practices and positive examples. All these actions and measures should particularly be aimed at creating new job opportunities, a more skilled workforce, more integration and inclusiveness.

Civil society organisations must be directly involved in how changes occur in partnership, through an inclusive bottom-up approach, so as to ensure a participatory endeavor and, ultimately, a genuinely fair transition.

Read more on the [EESC website](#) and check out the full text of the recommendations and conclusions, photos, videos and presentations of all guest speakers on the [event page](#). (jk/mr)

SOON IN THE EESC/CULTURAL EVENTS



["Youth Democracy Dialogues" to take place in March 2023](#)

The EESC is getting ready for the annual [YEYS! event](#), where students from all over Europe will have their say on their active citizenship in a participatory democracy.

Your Europe, Your Say! (YEYS!) is back for the 14th time, returning to an in-person format after three years online. Entitled Youth Democracy Dialogues, it will take place on 23 and 24 March 2023.

Taking place against the backdrop of the crisis in Ukraine, threats to peace and unpredictable societal and economic challenges leading to systemic shifts, this year's event will focus on how to raise awareness about democratic values while encouraging critical thinking, youth

empowerment and youth participation.

Over the two days, the students will take part in a series of workshops and interactive activities culminating in a set of recommendations that will be submitted to the European institutions and high-level European policy- and decision-makers.

Registrations closed on 6 December, and schools from all EU Member States and the seven candidate countries (Albania, Moldova, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine) had a chance to apply.

One school from each country will be chosen by drawing lots, and the winners will attend the two-day event, parts of which will also be webstreamed via the EESC's social media channels.

EESC members will visit each selected school well in advance to prepare students and teachers for the YEYS event. These visits will take place between January and February 2023 either in person or remotely. Documentation and teaching materials will be sent to schools ahead of the visits. (ck)

DO YOU KNOW THESE SPORTS WOMEN?

A virtual exhibition to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities

You are about to meet people who, thanks to their tremendous efforts and those of their families and the bodies that support them, are changing the world. They also represent all girls, young people and women with intellectual disabilities for whom SPORT has been a driver throughout their lives. They aim to be an example so that other women with disabilities can follow in their footsteps and enjoy their full right to take part in sport.

The exhibition consists of posters that display the stories and experiences of 24 female athletes from the eight Andalusian regions in Spain. Their stories reveal to us their strength, desire to overcome and dreams. By the end of your visit, you will know these women a little better, women who are making unstoppable progress through sport.

The project was launched in November 2021 by the Spanish and Andalusian Sports Federations for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (FEDDI and FANDDI), under the support of the Supreme Council for Sports of Spain. It aims to raise awareness and increase the visibility of sports women with intellectual disabilities.

The photographic exhibition is staged to highlight the work done by the EESC on issues that concern people with disabilities.

This is a cultural initiative organised with the support of the EESC's Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) and is linked to the SOC 690 opinion on "The EU action for Post COVID-19 period: recovering better through sport".



EESC exhibition pays tribute to sportswomen with disabilities

To mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), the EESC presents the virtual photographic exhibition "Do you know these sportswomen?"

The exhibition consists of a series of posters that present sportswomen from the eight provinces of Andalusia in Spain. All of them are female athletes with an intellectual disability, who live and breathe sport, thanks to their tremendous efforts and those of their families, without any obstacle that would otherwise prevent them from thriving in their activity.

The posters display the stories and experiences of 24 female athletes. Three posters per province showcase the courage, progress and strength that characterise these sportswomen, who, against all odds, use sport as a force for change in their lives.

The exhibition is being staged virtually from 1 to 31 December 2022. This is a cultural initiative organised in conjunction with the EESC own-initiative [opinion on "The EU action for Post COVID-19 period: recovering better through sport"](#) (ck)

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