



EESC Info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil society

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EDITORIAL



Editorial

Dear readers,

It has been a great pleasure and honour to represent the EESC during this two-and-a-half-year mandate. Despite the challenges, we have worked together to shape a Europe that is economically prosperous, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable. In doing so, we have faced tests such as COVID-19 and Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression on Ukraine, with all its socioeconomic consequences. We have also sought to tackle the energy crisis and high inflation, as well as to promote growth and competitiveness.

I will not be reviewing the successes achieved through our collective action over these past 30 months here. There will be time to outline these achievements during the renewal plenary session in April, which I cordially invite you to. I also encourage you to consult [this brochure](#), which lists most of them.

Throughout my presidency, I received a lot of support and recognition for the initiatives taken and delivered. The positive memories from this period will stay with me forever.

Now the time has come to draw a line and take stock of the lessons learned. First of all, we have learned from each other. We have learned that change is possible when there is a strong commitment, that even with our differences our Committee can stand out, and that united we can achieve much more than we can individually.

I would like to express my gratitude for the commitment and support of the EESC members and staff throughout my presidency. Together we have engaged in genuine dialogues with a view to further strengthening the voice of organised civil society in EU policy-making. Our commitment must continue.

In this last EESC Info edition under my presidency, you will find out more about some of our latest opinions and events. I therefore warmly invite you to continue reading.

I would also like to use this occasion to wish my successor an exciting journey with a lot of success.

Thank you. United for the future of Europe!

Christa Schweng

EESC President

DIARY DATES

6 May 2023, Brussels

EU Open Day

8 June 2023, Brussels

ECI Day

14-15 June 2023, Brussels

EESC plenary session



TO THE POINT

In our "To the point" column, we ask EESC members to highlight the most important elements of their opinions. This time round, Felipe Medina Martin indicates the elements of his opinion that can contribute to improving the functioning of the single market. His opinion on "The Single Market at 30 - how to further improve the functioning of the Single Market" will be put to the April plenary session. (ehp)



FELIPE MEDINA: 30 YEARS OF THE SINGLE MARKET, A CRITICAL REVIEW FROM THE EESC

The European Union is celebrating 30 years of the single internal market. The occasion calls for a thorough reflection, which the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) addresses in its opinion on *30 years of the single market: how to improve the functioning of the single market*. This opinion considers that this policy has been a great success, but that "a critical review and a new improvement is still needed ... in terms of the new challenges to be faced".

Across the pages of the opinion, one key word stands out: competitiveness. The EESC stresses the need to create a level playing field for businesses by "promoting growth and fair competitiveness, and creating a business-friendly and socially friendly environment". One of the main concerns is the "increasing emergence of regional and national regulatory initiatives that enter into force before the publication of European initiatives, and which then make it difficult to harmonise rules" and create difficulties for businesses in their day-to-day.

It is also urgent both to ensure that all new regulations pass a competitiveness test and to improve the quality of legislation in Europe and in the Member States, avoiding as far as possible superfluous or

confusing legislation that creates uncertainty for operators, which, among other things, leads to fragmentation of the European single market. In order not to lose competitiveness, it is also necessary to influence the free movement of people and workers; to deepen "a robust, ambitious digital policy"; to adopt a practical and realistic approach to the Green Deal priorities; and to improve the implementation of tools to monitor and control the functioning of the single market.

The EESC recognises buying alliances in many sectors as an example of good practices for competitiveness in view of the ability that some sectors – such as the retail and wholesale sectors – have shown to unite and become stronger at European level. "The retail and wholesale sectors, for example, have embraced the spirit and undeniable advantages of the single market to serve European consumers better everyday thanks to buying alliances and the single market".





"ONE QUESTION TO..."

In our column, *One question to...* we ask EESC members to highlight important issues in their opinions. Our guest is **Ozlem Yildirim**. We asked her about her opinion on the *Right to a healthy environment in the European Union especially in the context of the Ukrainian war*, voted on the April plenary session.



OZLEM YILDIRIM: HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO PRESERVE THE ENVIRONMENT

"The right to a healthy environment is absolutely vital to the social and economic well-being of people in Europe and worldwide." The International Labour Organisation (ILO), for example, estimates that around 40 % of jobs worldwide depend on a healthy climate. Although the EU has adopted many pieces of legislation, implementation is often poor. For this reason the EESC is calling for greater efforts to genuinely improve the effectiveness of existing legal instruments.

Against the background of the war that Russia is waging in Ukraine, and of the latter's future accession to the European Union, it is more important than ever that the Union and its Member States give effect to the right to a healthy environment. The EESC would stress that there is an urgent need to work towards better environmental protection with a

view to safeguarding fundamental rights in the Union and beyond. It highlights the fact that the situation has been exacerbated by the serious environmental damage caused by the war in Ukraine.

In particular, the EESC warns of the damage to people's mental and physical health, the degradation of ecosystems, air and water pollution and ground contamination, highlighting in particular the fragile nature of

food security world-wide. To the EESC's mind, Russia's actions are akin to "ecocide"; it calls for such ecocide to be officially criminalised under EU law.

Lastly, the EESC highlights how vital it is to document, map and measure these repercussions so as to provide legal protection for the environment, to ensure that those responsible are held to account and to lay the groundwork for a green and socially just post-war recovery.

NEW PUBLICATIONS



[The surprise guest](#)

In our *Surprise guest* column we feature a comment from **Diandra Ní Bhuachalla**, who will represent the European Economic and Social Committee as an EESC youth delegate to the COP summits in 2023 and 2024.



Diandra Ní Bhuachalla - EESC delegate to COP 28

EESC info: How do you see your role in the Committee and particularly as a delegate to COP 28? What do you wish to bring to the debate on climate change?

Diandra Ní Bhuachalla: "As the EESC's Youth Delegate to COP until 2025, I view my role as integral to our work of being truly representative and inclusive.

An ongoing issue experienced by various stakeholders engaging in international decision- and policy-making is exclusion, and this is something that young people know and feel all too well. Despite the fact that we are crucial changemakers on climate and possess a unique set of lived experiences, we are often told that our age prevents us from understanding and from constructing informed opinions. This discrimination can be compounded depending on one's race, gender, sexuality, culture, etc.

The longer this attempt at silencing continues, the more likely it is that young people will become disengaged. Who will save people and the planet then? What experienced and motivated leaders will we have in the lead up to 2050, a time when the really difficult decisions will need to be made?

Countless young people who have attended COP in past years have remarked how their greatest learnings and strongest relationships have been created outside of negotiation spaces. Whether inadvertently or not, the procedures in place for this to be the case are producing segregation. To overcome climate change, we need every voice and every idea to come together in solidarity. Sustained and effective climate action relies on the empowerment of marginalised groups. It is only then that we can achieve climate justice and ensure that no one is left behind in the fight of our lives."

Diandra Ní Bhuachalla has served as a United Nations Youth Delegate for Ireland (2021-2022), focusing on gender equality, climate justice, and peace and security following 11 years of advocacy at local and national level. She works with the National Youth Council of Ireland's Youth2030 team as coordinator of Youth Delegate programmes. She actively engages with the ESDN Youth Network and the Chatham House Common Futures Conversations programme. She was recently selected as a Future Generations Global Ambassador with Foundations for Tomorrow and the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

Diandra holds a BSc in Government, an LLB and an MSc in International Public Policy and Diplomacy from University College Cork.

EESC NEWS



EESC proposes actions to counter threats to EU democracy

On 23 March, the EESC debated with European Commission Vice-President Věra Jourová on how to strengthen democracies and democratic values across the European Union. It also adopted a resolution on this topic with practical proposals. Policymakers, experts and civil society organisations agreed that civic education, better funding for social partners and a focus on the local dimension are key to democracy in Europe.

"The European elections in 2024 will be a test of political will, and youth organisations will play a key role in mobilising first-time and young voters," said EESC President **Christa Schweng**, "but we must go beyond the elections. We need to better support our youth, re-connect with them in the democratic process and empower them for a fully-fledged active citizenship."

European Commission Vice-President **Věra Jourová** recognised the crucial role played by civil society organisations in defending and promoting democracy, often working in spaces where states have failed. "Active participation of people is not only desired but highly necessary," she said. "Democracy is under a stress test and we need to do much more to protect it and regain the trust of our people."

Participants highlighted the need for civil society organisations, including youth organisations, the social economy and voluntary sector, to have better access to funding and to be involved in defining where these resources should be used. They also agreed that transversal competences are the true backbone of a participatory and deliberative democracy.

Following the debate, the EESC adopted a resolution entitled "[United for Democracy: employers', workers' and civil society's organisations working for a sustainable democratic future](#)", which builds on the [recommendations of this year's Civil Society Days](#). The resolution aims to strengthen democracy by increasing public participation, and reinforce the structures for participatory democracy. It also calls for the effective implementation of Article 11 of the Treaty on the European Union on citizen participation, including a European strategy for civil society and a European Statute of Associations. (tk)



Renewables are the solution to the energy crisis

We need to invest more and more in renewable energy sources to secure a greener, safer and more affordable future for Europe: EESC president Christa Schweng and Energy commissioner Kadri Simson voiced this conviction as one at the EESC plenary session on 22 March.

Noting that skyrocketing energy prices, inflation and low economic growth had led to a very challenging year for citizens and businesses, **Ms Schweng** said that "working towards a clean energy transition in Europe, accelerating the roll-out of renewables, affordable energy prices, and securing and diversifying our energy supply remain top priorities for the EESC".

Ms Simson outlined the way forward for EU energy policy: "If I were to answer this in just one word, it would be 'renewables'. Because this is the Commission's top energy policy priority – to push forward and deliver on our renewable energy objectives".

For the first time ever, the EU is no longer dependent on Russian energy. Through gas supply diversification, reduced demand, increased efficiency and a stronger push on renewables, the EU has put an end to its massive dependency on Russia.

39% of the EU's electricity now comes from renewables. 2022 was a record year: the EU generated more electricity from wind and solar than from gas, with wind capacity increasing by 15 GW, and solar energy by 41 GW. (mp)



EESC discusses inclusive EU labour markets with Italian minister Marina Calderone

In a debate with Italy's labour minister on 22 March, the EESC backed the Commission's initiative to reinforce the role and independence of national equality bodies in a bid to wipe out discrimination practices in EU labour markets.

The two sides said they shared the goals of the Commission's proposal for a directive on standards for national equality bodies aimed at increasing their effectiveness. The proposal had been made following the failure of the current legislative measures on equality to adequately enforce EU law on unequal treatment and discrimination.

In its opinion on [Strengthening the role and independence of equality bodies](#) adopted at the plenary session after the debate, the EESC

stressed the importance of striking the right balance between the principle of subsidiarity and setting out binding standards for making national bodies stronger and more efficient – a position which was echoed by the Italian minister during the debate.

"The participation of diverse groups in the labour market is not only a matter of fairness. It makes great sense from an economic and social perspective. However, the Committee remains concerned that the protection against discrimination and inequality is not yet uniform throughout the Union, and supports strong mechanisms for their monitoring, including through the reinforcement of national equality bodies," EESC president **Christa Schweng** said.

Minister **Calderone** said her government agreed with the Commission's goal, however stressed that it would be important to ensure consistency with the national systems and bodies that already exist, such as equality councils in Italy that safeguard equality at both national and regional level.

"The inclusion we are talking about today must remain at the heart of the European social agenda, on an equal footing with the ongoing discussion about reforming the EU's economic and financial governance. We know how difficult it still is to ensure effective equal opportunities on the labour market. For some social groups there are still huge obstacles to accessing labour markets and social protection," **Ms Calderone** said.

The minister stressed the gender gap in employment rates was still over 10 % at the EU level. There was not a single country in the EU where this gender gap – to the detriment of women everywhere – did not exist. Young graduates also struggle to find a job. Persons with disabilities and legal migrants and refugees still encounter discrimination when looking for or trying to keep a job. (II)



Sustainable Development Goals: UN sees key role for civil society

Speaking at the EESC's March plenary session, the president of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) advocated a strong role for civil society in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Ambassador **Lachezara Stoeva**, President of the UN ECOSOC, said civil society players are indispensable allies for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"We have to be ambitious; global challenges require strong global answers", said EESC president **Christa Schweng**. "Civil society should have a seat at the table at the SDG September Summit, with more structured and concrete involvement", she added.

UN Ambassador **Lachezara Stoeva** said: "We cannot do anything without civil society. European civil society has often played a leadership role in forward-looking thinking. The EESC, with its multi-stakeholder nature, has the ability to contribute and make public policies more balanced, equitable and responsive".

The EESC has actively contributed to the EU's first Voluntary Review as a bloc, which will be presented at the High-Level Political Forum in July. In particular, the Committee has been producing a "model" contribution of civil society, which could be used as a best practice for other regions around the world. (mt)



Adequate minimum income – a viable road out of poverty

The EESC has lent its support to the European Commission's proposal for a Council recommendation on adequate minimum income, hailing it as a necessary part of efforts to combat poverty and to achieve the EU target of reducing the number of people at risk by at least 15 million by the end of the decade.

In the [opinion](#) adopted at its plenary session in March, the EESC said it particularly welcomed the implementation of realistic and not-overly-restrictive criteria for making minimum income available to all, at a level that guarantees people a life of dignity, not leaving anyone behind.

Making sure that minimum income schemes provide sufficient resources also requires keeping them in line with inflation, which is set to rise a further 6.5% in 2023 (in the context of the rise in the costs of living sparked by recent food and energy price hikes). To this end, the EESC proposes that Member States assess minimum income levels on a yearly basis, depending on the level of inflation.

This should be monitored by civil society organisations, social partners and welfare organisations.

"Effective minimum income schemes can help to guarantee that human rights are respected, ensure that people live in dignity, help them remain active and included in society and help integrate them into good quality employment," said the rapporteur of the opinion, **Jason Deguara**, adding that self-employed people should also be fully entitled to the minimum income and other benefits.

Rapporteur **Paul Soete** said: "The target is to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty by at least 15 million by 2030. At first glance, this target does not seem very ambitious, but the guidance provided to Member States and the basis for a solid methodology certainly make it an important step forward."

Minimum income levels and composition differ considerably across welfare states in general, and this is also the case in the EU. The labour market situation of minimum income beneficiaries varies significantly across Member States.

None of the EU countries currently ensure adequate income support for jobless families to avoid poverty risks. Due to eligibility conditions, such as minimum age, residence status, homelessness or family composition issues, some 20% of jobless people are not eligible to receive any support at all. There is also a problem of non-take-up of minimum income estimated at between 30% and 50%, to a large



[Strategic Foresight Report 2022: The EESC claims a bigger role in pinning down future trends and risks for the EU](#)

Addressing the European Commission's report on trends and issues to watch back in March, the EESC stressed that it could have helped much more if it had been involved in the foresight exercise from the start.

The [EESC opinion](#) on the 2022 [Strategic Foresight Report](#) (SFR), adopted at the March plenary session, stressed that the EESC can strengthen the EU's analysis and foresight capacities. As the eyes and ears of civil society, it is best placed to pinpoint emerging trends. As a demonstration of this, the EESC also volunteered early input to the forthcoming 2023 SFR.

The rapporteur, **Angelo Pagliara**, set out some of the thinking behind the opinion: "Many of the issues in the Commission's report have already been addressed by the EESC in its opinions in previous years, and we have very strong expertise and experience. So, come to us, involve us more, because we can really help you."

The 2022 SFR looks into how best to align the EU's climate ambitions and its potentially clashing digital goals, and identifies ten key areas where action is needed to maximise synergies and consistency. In this respect, the EESC calls for a strategic foresight agenda geared towards a new development model that combines economic, environmental and social sustainability and puts people at the centre.

One of the key weaknesses that the EESC pointed to in the 2022 report is the lack of a clear picture of risks and scenarios should the EU fail to meet its objectives when it comes to the availability of raw materials, rare earth metals and water resources.

Looking ahead to the 2023 SFR, which the Commission is expected to publish in the second quarter of 2023 focusing on a socially and economically sustainable Europe, the EESC singled out the following areas for special attention:

- supply systems and the resilience of Europe's agri-food sector;
 - fostering a strong, cohesive and innovative European industrial system that is capable of generating quality jobs;
 - the need to achieve strategic energy autonomy and to support businesses and workers, following on from what was done during the pandemic crisis. (dm)
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EESC advocates for protection of humanitarian aid and civil society in EU sanctions legislation

In its March plenary, the EESC adopted an opinion urging the European institutions to address the fragmented implementation of foreign policy sanctions across Member States. The EESC is concerned about these inconsistencies and calls for immediate action to offer humanitarian aid and protect journalists in sanctioned regimes.

The Council of the European Union sets foreign policy sanctions for all Member States. However, their implementation and enforcement are currently decentralised. This has resulted in a patchwork of differing definitions, scopes, penalties, and investigative capacities across Member States. The fragmentation undermines the effectiveness of EU sanctions and risks dividing the Union, with some countries more lenient on sanction violations than others. To address these issues, the European

Commission has proposed a directive to standardise criminal offences and penalties for violating EU sanctions.

With its opinion on the Violation of sanctions / EU crimes, the EESC urges the EU institutions to expand the humanitarian carve-out in order to prevent any unintended negative consequences on humanitarian aid and assistance. "We want to protect the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in need living under sanctioned regimes," explained EESC Member **José Antonio Moreno Díaz**, rapporteur of the opinion. "We ask for a standing humanitarian exemption, to ensure that humanitarian staff can operate without risking criminal liability".

The Committee stressed the need to provide adequate information and proactive support to the private sector and civil society organisations, to enable them to adjust to new legislation and comply with the requirements of sanction regimes. Member States must be equipped with sufficient administrative capacities, funds, and trained personnel to detect, prosecute and punish sanction violations. (gb)



Addressing the fertiliser crisis in Europe: actions for availability, affordability, and sustainability

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted an opinion on the EU strategy on fertilisers at its March plenary, calling for availability, affordability and sustainability.

The global fertiliser crisis has reached a critical level in Europe, where farmers are facing unprecedented challenges due to record prices and supply shortages. This crisis has been exacerbated by the recent war in Ukraine, making it a serious threat to European agriculture and global food security.

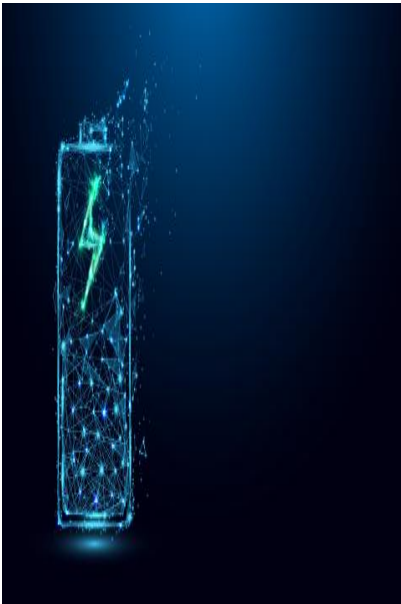
At its March plenary, the EESC welcomed the communication from the Commission on ensuring fertiliser availability and affordability, highlighting the need for emergency domestic actions to limit the impact of the crisis.

"Farmers face high fertiliser prices which impact on consumers. We welcome the European Commission's communication on ensuring their availability and affordability. However, emergency and longer-term actions are also required to limit the impact of the crisis," said **Arnold Puech d'Alissac**, rapporteur for the [EESC opinion](#).

The EESC has proposed various corrective measures to improve the functioning of the EU fertiliser market, including direct support to the most affected nitrogen manufacturers and farmers through state aid. However, the Committee also stresses the need to address fertiliser supply and prices by facilitating imports and domestic competition. This can be achieved by suspending EU import tariffs on all fertilisers, facilitating fertiliser logistics and providing regulatory flexibilities.

In addition to short-term measures, the EESC has called for medium-term solutions to limit the EU's dependence on imported mineral fertilisers and reduce the environmental footprint of crop fertilisation. The EESC has also welcomed the establishment of a new fertiliser market observatory in 2023 to increase transparency in the EU fertiliser market through the regular publication of representative domestic market prices and statistics on fertiliser production and use.

On the international stage, the EESC urges the EU to step up actions against global food insecurity by promoting fertiliser transparency, availability, and effective use. Global fertiliser trade should be facilitated by keeping markets open, avoiding export restrictions and bans, increasing fertiliser production in Europe and expanding logistics routes. (ks)



Digital energy systems can bring real benefits if implemented effectively

Too many obstacles still undermine the potential of digital energy systems. Smarter solutions are difficult to put into practice, especially due to heavy administrative procedures, lack of effective incentives, and the inflexibility of the transmission and distribution network owing to underinvestment in energy infrastructure.

These are the main conclusions reached in the EESC opinion "Digitalising the energy system – EU Action Plan".

The [opinion](#) was drawn up by the rapporteur **Thomas Kattnig** and co-rapporteur **Zsolt Kükedi** and adopted at the March plenary session.

Overall, the EESC backs the objectives and most of the measures proposed in the European Commission's action plan. However, in the EESC's view, the Commission fails to integrate it into the general energy policy and creates a silo approach. The digitalisation of the energy system must lead to cooperative solutions where users have incentives to participate in the digitalised energy system.

In the future design of energy infrastructure, all consumers must be actively involved in the development of smart energy systems. "It is extremely important to strengthen the role of active consumers in digitalisation and to encourage and enable them to use as many smart solutions as possible," said **Mr Kükedi**.

In addition, new data-driven services and innovative technology solutions risk not being implemented fast enough owing to a lack of skilled workers and trained professionals to help deploy them. To achieve these goals, targeted labour market and education policy measures must be adopted. "We need a coordinated approach and close cooperation with the social partners. The involvement of civil society organisations is essential," said **Mr Kattnig**. (mp)



Capital Markets Union: EESC comments on new listing requirements and EMIR review

On 23 March, the EESC adopted two opinions on the Commission's latest work to further develop a fragmented and underdeveloped EU Capital Markets Union: a new Listing Act and a review of the European Market Infrastructure Regulation (EMIR).

With a new Listing Act, the Commission aims to reduce the administrative burden of the listing process for companies of all sizes, particularly SMEs, so they can better access funding by listing on European public markets.

The EESC welcomes the initiative, as increasing equity funding and reducing dependence on bank loans for European companies are key to ensuring the post-pandemic recovery and building a resilient economic system. The Committee believes that bringing more family-owned

companies to capital markets would open up untapped potential to attract capital for growth.

EESC rapporteur **Kęstutis Kupšys** explains that "a multiple-voting rights regime helps families to retain control, making listing more attractive to them. It is also important to streamline the contents of a prospectus to significantly reduce the costs and burden for issuers. However, using "English-only" issuance documents, as per the Commission's proposal, would hinder the development of a national retail investment base."

The Commission has also proposed a new European Market Infrastructure Regulation (EMIR) to enhance the clearing capacity within the EU. On EMIR, the EESC had expected a clearer stance on reducing exposure to UK central counterparties (CCPs), as well as more specific rules and incentives to drive the move towards EU-based CCPs after Brexit.

EESC rapporteur **Florian Marin** said: "There is not a clear plan containing specific measures to create a competitive and consolidated clearing market. We regret that the current framework has not been assessed after five years, and propose that the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) issue a report on the reasons for the use of non-EU CCPs one year after the Regulation enters into force." (tk)



YEYS! 2023: Youth ask for a more transparent, digital and simplified EU

An EYou app to make the EU more accessible to young people was the most voted proposal emerging from the EESC's flagship youth event.

The 105 secondary school students from 35 schools in all EU Member States and the seven candidate countries who came to Brussels on 23 and 24 March for Your Europe, Your Say! (YEYS!) came up with the following five recommendations:

1. **EU simplified: an EYou app** enabling young people to engage directly with politicians and civil society by selecting their main interests and following the latest developments at grassroots level;
2. The **E-Youth** platform for information on the EU to simplify politics for younger generations, giving them a forum where their voices can be heard;
3. The **EYout(h)rust platform** will increase transparency in politics at local, national and EU level;
4. The **Youth Democratic Opinion (YDO)** project, which will improve the quality of civic education and engagement in Europe by establishing an EU ambassadorship programme assembling young people's views and proposing recommendations for policy makers;
5. More **EU-funded initiatives led BY young people FOR young people.**

"Tell us what your expectations and your hopes are for the future of Europe," said EESC president **Christa Schweng** to the students gathered for the event. "To tackle new challenges, the EU needs to listen to young people and take new ideas on board."

EESC vice-president for communication **Cillian Lohan** told the students that the EESC will take their recommendations to the European Parliament's European Youth Event (EYE) in Strasbourg in June 2023. For vice-president **Lohan**, "when the system starts to show cracks or when it is at risk, we all have to step up from our private activities and become active. You have taken that step today: thank you."

The discussions showed that youth believe that there is no space for their voices to be heard in the European Union right now. EESC member **Neža Repanšek** reassured them that this frustration is a good starting point for change: "My motivation for starting to participate actively was born of frustration. When young people come together, we can be a very powerful force."

This 14th YEYS event focused on "Youth Democracy Dialogues" and saw students from Ukraine and Moldova participate for the first time. (gb/tk)

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS



[EESC Employers' Group launches new priorities to boost competitiveness and achieve prosperity for all](#)

By the EESC Employers' Group

The Employers' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee has launched its policy priorities for 2023 and beyond. In a paper titled "Driving Prosperity for All: A Competitiveness Agenda for the EU", the group outlined a number of actions needed to restore business confidence and prosperity for all.

"Businesses deliver common good day in, day out. They are an integral part of society and play a pivotal role in creating jobs, providing sustainable goods and services that improve people's quality of life, even in times of crisis," said **Stefano Mallia**, President of the Employers' Group. "But in order to make sure that businesses continue to make a difference we need an EU competitiveness agenda".

The Group's document outlines a new economic and industrial path that would apply to all businesses (industry, services and agriculture). Based on two pillars, creating common good and focusing on the essentials, the Employers' Group priorities call for three areas of action.

First, access to basic production resources at competitive prices. This applies equally to energy, raw materials, labour, capital, and data. That means improving conditions for energy and raw materials' domestic production and for building resilient ecosystems and diversifying foreign suppliers, but also ensuring the availability of an adequate skilled workforce by facilitating mobility and economic migration, as well as setting up effective life-long learning systems anticipating change.

Second, we must enhance open markets with equal rules. Building on the benefits and progress made over the past 30 years of the single market, the EU must persistently and decisively identify and systematically

remove market barriers, while avoiding the creation of new ones. Member States must adhere to common rules and avoid gold-plating and new national regulations that are at odds with EU rules, helping avoid market fragmentation and loss of economies of scale.

Third, we must ensure business-friendly regulation and taxation. Businesses need a policy framework that fosters entrepreneurship and encourages enterprises to innovate, invest and trade. This requirement applies equally to regulation, taxation, and allocation of public funding. Embedding a "competitiveness check", which we employers have called for for the past two years, is part of the solution. But also accelerating permit procedures would prevent relocation and speed up the deployment of competitiveness.

To read and download the full paper, please click [here](#).



The weight of social policy and civil society in the future Spanish Presidency of the EU Council

by the EESC Workers' Group

Spain is planning to put the EU's social dimension at the heart of its six-month presidency of the bloc and this is translating into a record number of consultations for the European Economic and Social Committee on some of the major social issues of the day.

Spain will take on the presidency of the EU Council this July, as we approach the final stretch of Von der Leyen's term, running up to the 2024 European elections. Opening the way not just for the end of this term, but also for the future priorities of the next one, Spain has clearly stressed the social aspects they expect Europe to address, and its will to unlock and push through some of the most controversial files on social matters.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Spain has requested an extraordinary number of exploratory opinions from the EESC – no less than 20. These opinions range from the Social Progress Protocol, which the EESC championed at the Conference on the Future of Europe (and which, in the end, was included in the recommendations), to the issues of democracy at work, green collective bargaining, mental health and precariousness, but also the proposal for a Social Imbalances Procedure. The EESC is already finalising work on some of them, and will therefore be ready to feed its contribution into the policy process from the beginning. (ppr)



Poverty reduction: the EU needs poverty-proof policies

By the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

A debate recently organised by the Group stressed that poverty in the EU is too big and complex a problem to leave the burden of relieving it solely on grassroots organisations; a spectrum of policy measures is needed.

Poverty still needs to be combated in the EU and in the rest of the world. This is all the more important as the cost of living has increased

significantly since the onset of the war in Ukraine. While civil society organisations provide important solutions to tackle the effects of poverty, it is clear that future policy measures must be poverty-proof. These are the conclusions of a discussion held by the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group on 22 March 2023. The event was attended by high-level guest speakers, including Italy's Minister for Labour and Social Policies, **Marina Elvira Calderone**.

Séamus Boland, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, stressed that, with one in five people in Europe still at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2021 (equivalent to 95.4 million people, or 21.7% of the EU population in 2021, according to Eurostat), policy-makers at all levels could not ignore the fact that poverty remained a problem in the EU. He added that "the motto 'Leaving no one behind' must not lose its meaning." Poverty was cited as the main reason for people being excluded from workplaces, education and basic health services. It was the single biggest cause of social exclusion and inequality.

In her speech, **Ms Calderone** emphasised that the fight against poverty required significant investment in social and professional networks to take people on a development journey that could upgrade human potential. "It is essential to ensure that public authorities promote autonomous citizens' initiatives through appropriate legal frameworks that enable the development of new organisational forms," said Ms Calderone. "We all need to respond to the different forms of poverty and to the specific needs of the regions."

Carlos Susias, president of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), stressed the responsibility of...

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SOON IN THE EESC/CULTURAL EVENTS



[EU Open Day back in person](#)

The traditional Open Doors day will take place again in-person on Saturday 6 May 2023. The EESC will join forces with other EU institutions and welcome visitors interested in learning what the EU is all about.

After the long break due to the pandemic, visitors will once again have an opportunity to find out more about the European Economic and Social Committee and how it makes a difference as the only institution representing organised civil society in Europe. Members and staff will be there to welcome them and answer their questions.

A special focus for this year will be on opportunities for lifelong learning as part of the European Year of Skills 2023.

Guests will be welcomed on Saturday 6 May 2023, from 10.00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the Jacques Delors building in Brussels. (mp)

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