



## rEUnaissance: Luca Jahier, the new president of the EESC, vows to revive civic engagement for a sustainable Europe

17/04/2018

Reference number: 18/2018



Italy's **Luca Jahier** has been elected as the 32<sup>nd</sup> president of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the EU body representing organised civil society, which he will head for the next two and a half years. The two new vice-presidents will be **Milena Angelova** (Bulgaria) for budget and **Isabel Caño Aguilar** (Spain) for communication.

In an inspiring speech, delivered on 18 April at the EESC plenary, which marked the end of the presidency of **Georges Dassis** and welcomed the new presidency of Mr Jahier, the new president set out the four priorities of his programme: **sustainable development, promotion of peace, strengthening the role of culture and giving a voice to Europe's young people.**

"I invite all of you to join me in a strong civic engagement for our sustainable European future. I invite you to dream with me of a re-energised Europe and to work together for a second European Renaissance!" **Mr Jahier** told the 350-member body, which following the appointment of its new Bureau stands as a shining example of gender equality, with many senior positions filled by women.

Europe – still plagued by high levels of poverty and the unresolved migration crisis, as well as by the low levels of trust in democratic institutions – would benefit from a powerful humanistic revolution and a transformation similar to that of the Renaissance, **Mr Jahier** added, hoping that his four priorities "for a unifying agenda for the future" could give this "**rEUnaissance**" a real chance.

The president's programme places the greatest emphasis on **sustainable development**, which should underpin all transformations that will shape the Europe of tomorrow, such as the fourth industrial revolution, a circular and low-carbon economy, growing challenges to EU values, threats to peace and stability on the EU's borders and many others.

Bottom-up initiatives involving local and regional governments, citizens and civil society will have a key role to play in this agenda for achieving economic prosperity, which must go hand in hand with environmental sustainability and social inclusion.

Mr Jahier's second priority is the **promotion of peace**, which should not be taken for granted now that the EU faces challenges such as Brexit, growing tensions in the Western Balkans and a rise in terrorism and undemocratic practices in some Member States.

The third priority of the new presidency is **strengthening the role of culture**, which Mr Jahier sees as a unifying and mobilising force for a Europe that shares a common heritage, history and values. "Culture can help us to overcome the current systemic, political and identity crisis in Europe and encourage us to dream, to create new perspectives," **Mr Jahier** stressed.

The final priority is making **young people** the very first agents of change and giving them the space and voice they deserve.

Commending the work of his predecessor, **Mr Dassis**, on important issues such as migration, the social pillar and the future of Europe, **Mr Jahier** said he would continue on this path and would strive to further improve the EESC's role in fighting against nationalistic and populist trends, which are on the rise in many Member States, as well as addressing the shrinking civic space.

He said the EESC would take an active part in the upcoming "strategic *rendez-vous*", such as the EU summit on the future of Europe and participation in President Macron's citizen consultations. The Committee also needs to enhance cooperation with other EU institutions and strengthen dialogue with civil society at large in all EU countries.

"We have the opportunity to give a new impulse to European civil society engagement. For the Europe of tomorrow, we must have the courage; we must dare to *imagine* a new world. There is no time to waste, as so many defeats in history can be summarised in two words: too late," **Mr Jahier** concluded.

In their inaugural speeches, the two vice-presidents talked about the importance and value of the EESC's work.

"The EESC has a unique and key role to play here, being in a position to present the balanced view of the social partners and organised civil society on how to work together more effectively to achieve a more united and more federal Europe... I believe that the motto of the current Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union - United we stand strong - is directly relevant and should be fully endorsed," said **Ms Angelova** who will be in charge of the EESC budget.

The elected vice-president for communication, **Ms Caño Aguilar**, said: "We are the voice of the workers, the employers, the activists, the voluntary workers, the consumers, the disabled, the farmers. We are the cement which has provided the foundations for Europe, which is doing so today and which will continue to provide those foundations in the future. The Committee is the real point of dialogue, the bridge between the European institutions and the machinery that keeps everything moving. And in this role, we must listen and speak out."

## **Background**

- **Luca Jahier (IT):** EESC president, former president of the Various Interests Group from 2011 to 2018 - [President's webpage](#)
- **Milena Angelova (BG):** vice-president of the EESC, former vice-president of the Employers' Group from 2010 to 2018 - [Vice-President's webpage \(budget\)](#)
- **Isabel Caño Aguilar (ES):** vice-president of the EESC, former vice-president of the Sustainable Development Observatory from 2013 to 2018, Workers Group - [Vice-President's webpage \(communication\)](#)
- [EESC Organisational chart \(political\) 2018 - 2020](#)
- Unlike the EESC Members, who are elected for a five-year term of office, the president and two vice-presidents are chosen from each of the three groups (Employers' Group, Workers' Group and Various Interests' Group) in rotation, for two-and-a-half-year terms. They are elected by a simple majority during the inaugural assembly session, which on this occasion took place on 18 April. This is called the mid-term renewal. Following his election, the president set out the work programme for his term of office. The **president** is responsible for the orderly conduct of the Committee's business, and represents the EESC in its relations with other institutions and bodies. The **two vice-presidents** - elected from among the members of the two groups to which the president does not belong - are responsible for communication and the budget respectively.
- The EESC is made up of 350 members from its 28 Member States. Nominated by their national governments, they are appointed by the Council of the European Union for a period of five years. They then work **independently** in the interests of all EU citizens. These members are not politicians but employers, trade unionists and representatives of various activities, such as farming, consumer and environmental organisations, the social economy, SMEs, the liberal professions and associations representing persons with disabilities, the voluntary sector, gender equality, youth, academia, etc.

Read [the inaugural speech](#).