Solidarity between the Generations: empowering senior citizens of the European Union

The working methods of the European Council were changed to become a co-operation between three subsequent countries establishing a trio presidency. After the first two trios (held by Germany, Portugal and Slovenia in 2007-2008 and France, Spain and Hungary in 2009 including a public hearing on its draft text in Budapest, Hungary. The document – to be adopted by the EESC plenary in March 2010 – urges an institutional approach to the involvement of civil society in the work of the Council Presidencies e.g. through the holding of high visibility European civil society events. The next of these will take place in Malaga, Spain in May 2010 and Budapest, Hungary is ready to host a similar European civil society summit a year later.

This institutional shuffle provides an opportunity for civil society as well as to find new ways to interact and even – ambitious it may sound – influence the presidency programmes. It is in this context that the elaboration of an EESC own initiative opinion entitled „Civil society organisations and Council presidencies” was started in 2009 including a public hearing on its draft text in Budapest, Hungary. The document – to be adopted by the EESC plenary in March 2010 – urges an institutional approach to the involvement of civil society in the work of the Council Presidencies e.g. through the holding of high visibility European civil society events. The next of these will take place in Malaga, Spain in May 2010 and Budapest, Hungary is ready to host a similar European civil society summit a year later.

It is encouraging to see that various segments of civil society of the current trio countries have realised the potential of undertaking joint initiatives. As a new development it promotes not only the trio presidency but makes citizens’ involvement and participation a reality. The final objective of these exercises is to actively contribute to the ever widening gap (e.g. reflected in turnout figures in European Parliamentary elections) between the European institutions and the citizens.

In very concrete terms: for a presidency to be remembered, not because of the capital city paralysed by VIP auto convoys, but because of decisions taken for the improvement of our societies.
Interview of the month continued...


Participants included people experiencing poverty, community action groups, NGOs, politicians and public service workers. It was a very stimulating and thought provoking event which commenced with a short film of young people voicing their concerns about housing, education, jobs and life opportunities and asking our governments what action they would be taking.

The speakers included representatives of young and older people, kinship carers, environmental groups, action on poverty groups and politicians. The debate was robust and critical and highlighted the gaps between rhetoric and reality for many people who have to make stark choices between heating, food and other necessities. There was a strong emphasis on not taking enough practical steps to eradicate poverty although there was considerable knowledge about the causes and effects. This could lead to a denial of fundamental human rights, loss of dignity, stereotyping individuals and compounding the problems by offering those in poverty poor services. Intrinsic unfairness in the tax system, the complexity of benefit systems, the impact of fuel poverty, poor housing, different responses from each local authority, the lack of jobs, lack of skills training to meet new job demands, levels of wages which disadvantaged people, lack of child care facilities, lack of support to family carers for young and older people. The politicians emphasised the commitment to eradicating child poverty by 2020 and to creating initiatives to stimulate job creation and acknowledged that considerable effort was required to ensure real change.

EUROPE III – As a member of the EESC’s Liaison Group, what are your perceptions on the future opportunities to strengthen the cooperation between the EESC and AGE PLATFORM (joint actions, activities)?

AGE welcomes all opportunities to work with the EESC. For example we respond to EESC invitations to contribute comments on draft opinions and to participate in consultations. In the future we would welcome working with the EESC on the issue of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity. This could take the form of an annual open debate to mark the European Day of Intergenerational Solidarity (29 April). AGE and a coalition of NGOs including some Liaison Group members (European Youth Forum, Eurochild, European Women’s Lobby, COFACE, AIM) as well as CECODHAS, the Red Cross, ENAR, FEFAF are running a campaign together to promote a new vision of a society for all ages based on greater cooperation and cooperation between generations.

Group III members in the spotlight playing a key role

From the left, Group III member Dr. Renate Heinisch, Ken Bluestone (UK), International Political and Policy Adviser AGE Concern England and Helen R. Hamlin (USA) IFA Main Representative at the UN

Important Message from the AARP-UN Briefing Series on global Ageing New York, 2-3 February 2010

Dr. Renate Heinisch represented the EESC and took part in an International High Level Forum for Best Practices and Policy Solutions in the Session “Global Health and Human Rights” and the Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in relation to the theme of the Commission for Social Development, “Social Integration”. The discussion focused on strengthening the human rights of older persons and including them as agents of change in their societies.

Demographic change is resulting in unprecedented numbers of older people worldwide. Greater numbers of people will be affected by age discriminations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international rights conventions apply to all persons regardless of age. However, age is not listed explicitly as a reason why someone should not be discriminated against. There are a number of regional conventions that protect the rights of older people, but not systematically or comprehensively. A UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is therefore necessary to ensure that this larger and larger population group can realise their rights: right to freedom from discrimination, right to freedom from violence, right to social security, to health, to work, to property. While UN conventions are agreed by governments, civil society organisations play an important role, holding governments to account for the decisions they make. The EESC, given its specific role of representing the European civil society next to the European institutions, and as continuous defender of human rights, should endorse the realisation of such a convention!

Maureen O’Neill (UK) Member of Group III

The Scottish Assembly for Tackling Poverty: 2010 and beyond: Creating Visions of a Better Scotland for All, Glasgow, 5th February 2010

I attended this conference which was organised by the Poverty Alliance Scotland as one of several events to highlight the magnitude of the problems experienced by those in poverty. On 26 February Luca Jahier, Vice-President of Group III participated in the concluding conference of the project “European Citizens’ Panel – New Democratic Toolbox for New Institutions” which was held at the EESC and organised by ECAS in the framework of the EC “Europe for Citizens’ Programme”. The project was set-up and managed by ECAS, in cooperation with four specialised organisations in Germany, Bulgaria, Latvia and Hungary. The main aim of the conference was to define new democratic “toolboxs” for new institutions through the creation of panels of European citizens who actively debated a number of important questions. In his intervention, during the final panel discussion on the topic “On the outlook for citizen participation in Europe,” Luca Jahier welcomed this initiative “that stimulates citizens’ active participation and awareness of the European decision and policy making process.” He went on to recommend linking it to the ongoing works on civil dialogue relying on the role of organised civil society organisations in which citizens can actively and efficiently play an active part. The conference also provided an occasion to debate direct democracy, supporting the idea that only citizens’ direct action makes sense and insisting that institutions should make direct dialogue with citizens a top priority.

GETTING TO KNOW THE NEW COMMISSION

On 11 February 2010, Group II President, Staffan Nilsson, met, on her first day in office, European Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou who has responsibility for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth. They discussed Education and Culture as a tool for the new EU 2020 Strategy.

On 26 March 2010, COFACE is organising a seminar in Brussels entitled: “The role of social protection in the fight against poverty and social exclusion: which safety net for families?”, The seminar will aim at discussing the role of social protection systems in preventing and tackling poverty and social exclusion of families, including a debate on challenges for the future of these systems in Europe. It will be the opportunity for representatives of COFACE member organisations, of European social NGOs, of the European Institutions, and of other stakeholders to exchange on this key topic in the framework of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The registration form and full programme can be downloaded here: http://coface-eu.org/en/Family-Social-Policies/Events/Seminar-Social-protection/

On 3 March 2010, COPA COGECA issued a press release entitled: “EU farm leaders emphasise the positive role that agriculture plays in building Europe” You can consult the press release here: http://www.copa-cogeca.eu/Main.aspx?page=HomePage

On 31 March 2010 Euro coop will hold a conference in partnership with the EESC entitled: “Building a Fair Food Retail Market in Europe” The President of Group III, Staffan Nilsson, will deliver a welcome speech and the keynote address will be given by Antonio Tajani, Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship.

The full programme and other background information on the conference can be found here: http://www.europco-op.org/events/en/conference_fair_food_Retail_market10/default.asp

On 3 March 2010, COPA COGECA issued a press release entitled: “EU farm leaders emphasise the positive role that agriculture plays in building Europe” You can consult the press release here: http://www.copa-cogeca.eu/Main.aspx?page=HomePage

In preparation for the crucial negotiations on the Europe 2020 strategy, EDF and the EP Disability Intergroup wrote a letter to Mr Barroso and Mr Van Rompuy to be sure decision makers hear the voice of 65 million persons with disabilities in Europe.

To read the open letter please follow this link: http://www.edf-feph.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=133855&thebloc=21873

On 3 March 2010 UEAPME issued a press release entitled: ‘EU 2020 strategy must now earn Member States’ full support, say SMEs.” To read the full text, please go to: http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/100301_pr_EU2020.pdf

To mark International Women’s Day 2010, the EDF issued a statement on their website entitled: “Women with Disabilities have to be included in EU gender policies.” To read the statement, please see: http://www.edf-feph.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=133855&thebloc=23949

On 7th May, the members of the SMEs, Crafts and Professions Category will attend a workshop on “Small Businesses in European Peripheral Regions” The event is being organised by the Maltese members of the EESC and will take place on the island of Gozo. The participants will discuss existing EESC opinions on the role of businesses in peripheral areas, the role of public and private actors at European and National level and national case studies will be presented concentrating on insular, rural and mountainous areas.

The Social Economy Category held a meeting on 9 March 2010. There was an exchange of views with Alain Coheur, President of Social Economy Europe and other agenda points included an evaluation of the work-programme in 2009 and a discussion on priorities for 2010.

More information on the work of the categories can be found on our website, by contacting the spokespersons of the categories, or the Secretariat of Group III at: gr3@eesc.europa.eu.

Overview of our Members’ Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 17-18 February 2010 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.


In this opinion, the EESC acknowledges the complexity of negotiations, potential risks and opportunities that the EPA represents for both the Cariforum States and the ORs and, more generally, for the EU and the Committee strongly recommends that local authorities in the ORs be consulted in all discussions relating to the EU-Cariforum EPA, and that organised civil society be more involved in the process. In conclusion, the EESC sets out a number of areas in which an integrated approach in the region could prove useful and effective, such as fisheries, inter-island transport and tourism.

Frank ALLEN (IE) – NAT/450 “Future strategy for the EU dairy industry for the period 2010-2015 and beyond” (EESC opinion 260/2010)

In this own-initiative opinion, the EESC stresses the importance of ensuring the viability of the EU dairy industry after 2015, maintaining that various agricultural policy measures will still be necessary, combined with a safety-net system in order to support and stabilise prices and prevent them from falling below a certain level. Moreover, it is important to limit excessive price fluctuations and also provide sufficient reserve stocks to cover unforeseen shortages or natural disasters. Food in general and milk in particular, are too important for the well-being of citizens to be subject to the vagaries of a free, unregulated market system.


Mr Derek OSBORNE (UK) is the Rapporteur for the explanatory opinion on: “Towards widespread use of electric vehicles” – TEN/419.

Mr Bernardo HERNANDEZ BATALLES (ES) will chair the study group for the explanatory opinion on: “Energy poverty in the context of liberalisation and the economic crisis” – TEN/420.

Mr Armands KRAUZE (LV) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: “Security of supply in agriculture and in the food sector in the European Union” – NAT/468.

Mr Derek OSBORNE (UK) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: “Towards a 2012 World Summit for Sustainable Development” – NAT/SDO/469.

Mr Lutz RIBBE (DE) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: “Options for an EU vision and target for biodiversity beyond 2010” – NAT/SDO/471.

Mr Claudio CAPPELLINI (IT) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: “Change in the EU’s creative industries – Unlocking their full potential” – CCMU/74.

Mr Janos TOTH (HU) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Mutating industries and perspectives for the metal working industry” – CCMU/75.

Mrs Elżbieta SZADZIŃSKA (PL) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Changes and prospects for the textile services sub-sector in Europe” – CCMU/76.

Mr Panagiotis GIKOFAS (EL) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “An EU response to a changing balance of global economic power” – ECO/274.

Mr Michael SMYTH (UK) is the Rapporteur, working alone, for the opinion on: “European Union financial contributions to the International Fund for Ireland (2007-2010)” ECO/276.

Mr Miklós BARBÁBAS (HU) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: “From the Black Forest to the Black Sea – Contribution to the drawing up of a Danube Strategy” – ECO/277.

Mr Krzysztof PATER (PL) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Financial participation by workers in Europe” – SOC/371.

Mrs Anne-Marie SIGMUND (AT) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Ireland as a candidate country” – REX/305.

Mr Claudio CAPPELLINI (IT) will chair the study group for the information report on: “The role of the Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions in the new economic, social and environmental world governance” – REX/307.

Editors of this edition: Liam O’Brádaigh, Pasuta Paliombelli and Enrica Nardello • Editor in Chief: Marc Beffort

Secretariat of the Various Interests’ Group, European Economic and Social Committee, 40 Rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels • Tel. +32 (0)2 546 9248; +32 (0)2 546 9548 • e-mail: gr3@eesc.europa.eu • www.eesc.europa.eu/groups/3/index_en.asp

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