New Year message: ‘Unity in Diversity’

As 2014 has drawn to a close and we welcome 2015, allow me to wish you a very Happy New Year, full of health and fulfilment. May we all have the strength to pursue the activities and values that are dear to us. May our Europe overcome the challenges it faces, and may our Committee strive confidently towards renewal!

2014 was indeed a pivotal year for Europe, not only for the political changes of a new European legislature and executive, but also as a year of commemoration and reflection. In remembering the centenary of the First World War and the 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, we have come to realise once again the importance of looking backwards in history in order to be able to better manage Europe’s future. If over these last 100 years the map of Europe has completely changed, Empires have collapsed and countries divided, it is also true that we are still living with the consequences of the past 1989 world. Despite the fact that we have not undergone the ‘End of History’, as forecast by the historian Fukuyama, nonetheless 1989 did result in the ‘Shock of Civilisations’ as anticipated by the historian Huntington. For this reason, it was an immense personal pleasure on 9 November, to see 8,000 balloons gently lifting upwards towards the sky, along the 15 km of the former Berlin Wall. In listening to Beethoven’s ‘Ode to Joy’ being played at the Brandenburg Gate, one did indeed feel the weight of history, but also an enormous pride at being European. If we have managed this level of reconciliation in Europe, the doors for the future should be wide open.

Nonetheless, the challenges for 2015 are numerous, be it for Europe, the EESC or the Various Interests Group. For this reason, I would like to dedicate this New Year message to a single motto: ‘Unity in Diversity’, which I consider Group III when the way forward for each actor. For the EU, 2015 will be a year of expectations, with the implementation of the Investment Plan for Europe, the review of the EU2020 Strategy and an EC work programme dedicated to employment creation, growth and investment. But it will also be a year of uncertainties, as the Greek parliamentary elections in January raise the spectre of political turmoil and renewed fears of a Grexit. Similarly, the results of the UK’s elections in May will have a direct impact on the country’s relations with the EU and on the future of the European Treaties. Of course, let us also not forget the uncertain international environment, with failing oil prices, an impending financial crash in Russia, an increasingly strong dollar, the multiplicity of serious conflicts and the escalating numbers of migrants crossing EU borders.

As regards the EESC, 2015 will constitute a specific political, legislative and administrative context, with the five-year renewal of the Committee and a legislative gap in the annual work of the European Commission. For these reasons, in 2013 as last year, the Various Interests Group will continue its collaborative approach to governance, seeking consensus over conflict, driving new ideas, capitalising on diversity and prioritising the cumulative benefit of the entire EESC. In 2014, the Various Interests Group obtained three principal achievements which we will strive wholeheartedly to replicate this year: a policy of ‘open doors and windows’ to new actors, ideas and perspectives. The building of new frontiers and lastly, the creation of synergies. However, because of the specificities of 2015, this year it is imperative that we balance our internal and external activities, that we continue to pursue targeted and relevant thematic events and that we engage in a multitude of ‘Going Local’ activities, where possible at the initiative of members and linked to civil society organisations. Crucially, we must continue along the fruitful path of our mandate since 2006, whereby Group III has invested in and demonstrated concrete added value to the work of the entire EESC. For over the last five years, we have addressed a number of key issues including Article 11 of the TEU, ECI consultations and civil dialogue, the social economy and social enterprises, social innovation as a means to promoting the EU’s social dimension, the liberal professions as key actors for growth, the green economy, the credit crunch and the role of SMEs, measuring ‘Beyond GDP’ as an instrument of effective growth, disability, fundamental rights and volunteering as a key dimension of participatory democracy. This has been achieved not only through thematic events, but also through the work of the Categories which play a crucial role in feeding into strategic priorities, and in strengthening privileged relations with civil society and the European Institutions. The challenge for 2015, will be to maintain the momentum, to build on this acquis through relevant thematic events, but also to continue supporting our members working in different EESC bodies and to define the strategic guidelines for the next mandate.

For 2015 we have already planned a number of events. These include a commemorative visit to Ypres in Flanders in February to mark the centenary of the First World War, a conference in Riga in March on the subject of Economic Growth and Social Progress in Rural and Urban Areas and a high-level meeting in June in Brussels, which will take stock of the entirety of the thematic work of the Various Interests Group over the last five years. It is also envisaged to commission a study linked to the June event, which would examine the Group’s strategic contribution over the period 2010-15, to future European policy-making. But we will also follow-up on last year’s priorities, with two events scheduled to take forward the discussions that we had at the Milan conference in October 2014. Moreover, from late Spring 2015, preparations will begin within the ordinary Group meetings, for the EESC renewal scheduled for October. This will be a lengthy and complex process, which will undoubtedly occupy a significant proportion of time and resources.

Before ending this editorial, I would like to mention a positive development, which should both console and inspire us for the next months. According to the ECI’s statistical service Eurobarometer, since the elections to the European Parliament in May 2014, there has been an increase in the number of citizens who have a positive view of the EU and an increase in the number of citizens who have confidence in the EU. Let us hope that we will all be able to live up to those expectations, firstly, with concrete results for the lives of EU citizens and secondly, through an improved participatory democracy!

INTERVIEW: European Year for Development - 2015

CONCORD is a European confederation of Relief and Development NGOs. It is made up of member organisations 28 national associations, 15 international networks and 2 associate members that represent over 1,800 NGOs, supported by millions of citizens across Europe. They are also the main interlocutors with the EU institutions on development policy. It will lead the Civil Society Alliance during the European Year for Development 2015.

Marius Wanders is the EU Representative & Executive Director of World Vision Brussels & EU Representation, a Board Member of Concord and one of the initiators and main driver of the European Year project.

EUROPE II – Knowing that you personally and also as representative of Concord played a key role in promoting the European Year for Development what would be your personal preferences as outcomes of the year?

IDEALLY, as a result of the European Year I would like to see three concrete outcomes:

Firstly, we should be able to witness and actually measure a paradigm shift in the way that citizens of the EU in general will be thinking and speaking about the international development cooperation efforts of their own member state and of the EU institutions. That paradigm shift ideally begin to shift from ‘we are providing charity (which we can ill afford given the growing problems we face in Europe)” to “we are promoting and achieving more global justice’.

Secondly, we want to see some myths busted, myths like (a) ‘Development aid is not working, people in Africa and all those other developing countries are still poor, it is money wasted”, (b) “all development aid does is make corrupt government leaders in

Luca JAHIER (IT)
President of the “Various Interests” Group

Marius Wanders
Board Member of Concord and Ambassador of the broad Civil Society Alliance for the European Year 2015 for Development

Interview
Some of these stakeholders will be easy to reach out to, as we know who they are and how to get in touch with them. However, others are less known to us, as we are less known to them. This is where the EESC with its very broad outreach could help us get in touch with these stakeholders with whom we are less familiar, given that the EESC brings together at EU level representatives of all those sectors which we wish to involve in shaping this broad alliance activities (the private sector, trade unions and special interest groups, NGOs and other civil society actors, such as consumers and environmental NGOs). The work of forming the broad CSO Alliance has already started some months ago and some interesting and exciting opportunities of working together have already been explored and are being further developed.

**Other news that matters**

**The Consumers and Environment Category met for a whole day on Tuesday 13 January 2015.** Following some words of introduction by Reine-Claude Mader who focussed on consumer concerns and behaviour in connection with trends in the energy mix, there then followed presentations on three specific issues, in the form of a Round Table discussions on the general theme of: Supply and demand trends in new energies: consumption, environmental and regulation issues. Firstly, Marie Donnelly, Director for Renewables, Research and Innovation, Energy Efficiency, DG Energy (ENER), European Commission made a presentation on: The Commission’s operational priorities for diversification and modernisation of energy supply for consumers. Then, Group III member, Luz Ribbe (DE), President of the EESC’s Sustainable Development Observatory spoke about: the Changing the future of energy: civil society as a key actor in the area of renewable energy:.

**Comment on the Universities for Europe project to date**

In the context of our work on the EYD2015, we have invited the universities to engage with the EESC and in particular Group III. What might be the best ways of reaching out to new players and engage with them, incl. consumers, farmers and others (but also private sector and trade unions)? A key priority for CONCORD will be to successfully cooperate for implementing the broadly defined civil society alliances of civil society actors and other stakeholders from many different sectors around the theme of international development cooperation, now and in the future, by fully engaging the EU citizens who make up these alliances as actors and activists. In thinking regarding the way we will shape our work in the future and contribute to a fairer and more just world, including a fairer and more just Europe.

**Highlights of the December 2014 EESC Plenary Session**

Mr Michael SMYTH (UK) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: “Economic governance review: report on the application of Regulations” – ECO/375.

Mr Etele BARÁTH (HU) is the President of the study group on the opinion on: “Economic governance review: report on the application of Regulations” – ECO/375.

Ms Teresa TISZBEREK (PL) is the President of the study group for the project on: “Draft Joint Employment Report” – EMPL/356.

Mr Thomas PALMGREN (FI) is the President of the study group for the Information Report on: “Shifting Economies in the World, Consequences for EU competitiveness” – CCM/134.

Mr Mr. Bernardo HERNANDEZ BATALIUS (ES) is the President of the study group on: “Economic governance review: report on the application of Regulations” – ECO/375.

Mr Roberto CONFALONIERI (IT) is the President for the exploratory opinion on: “Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area – Progress so far and remaining challenges” – TDV/564.

Ms Indre VAREBKE (LT) is the Rapporteur for the Information Report on: “How media is used to influence social and political processes in the EU and neighbouring countries” – REX/452.

Mr Paragotis KOKFAS (EL) is the Co-rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: “ITT and its impact on SMEs” – REX/433.

Mr Andris GOBIŅŠ (LV) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: “An Investment Plan for Europe” – CCMI/134.

Mr. Etele BARÁTH (HU) is the President of the study group on: “An Investment Plan for Europe” – CCMI/134.

Mr Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL) is the Co-rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: “An Investment Plan for Europe” – CCMI/134.

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The EESC's commitment to the Social Economy agenda was highlighted during Italian Presidency Conference “Unlocking the potential of the social economy for EU growth” held on November 17-18 in Rome. The Italian Presidency set itself the ambitious and urgent goal of defining the core concepts and objectives of European policy. The EESC President Luca Jordan highlighted that the objective from the Statutory Declaration and the Rome Strategy and one of the intermediate phases has been the Social Enterprise Project Report of the EESC. Mr Jordan stressed the need to support the Social Economy sector to unleash its full potential by coordinating social economy and social innovation better through partnerships and to be brave in innovating with social initiatives.

The result of the conference, the Rome Strategy, contains the message that the Social Economy world wants to convey to European institutions: the need to recognize the significant role the Social Economy plays for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Italian Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Gianluca Pioletti, who spoke concluded the conference, officially committed to disseminating the Rome Strategy at the National and European level and will present the strategy to the Council in December. Further there is a letter signed jointly by the three Labour ministers of Italy, Latvia and Luxembourg to Mr. Juncker, supporting the adoption of the Rome Strategy by the EU Commission.

The EESC continues to play a central role in promoting the Social Economy through the work in the Social Economy Category Group and the recently approved continuation of the Social Enterprise Project until October 2015. Key is now to ensure that the EU Institutional agenda continues to support Social Economy and to not lose momentum at this critical time.

The Rome Strategy document is available on the conference website www.socialeconomyin.eu in English and Italian.

**Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role**

The Members of European Parliament welcomed the opinion by the EESC and underlined the key role played by the Liberal Professions for growth and civil society in Europe. They encouraged the EESC to continue its work on this subject in order to raise the potential for further growth that this sector has.

*The EESC Study referred to above can be consulted here: [http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?pageID=6139&l=en]

**FROM THE IRON CURTAIN TO THE EUROPEAN GREEN BELT – TURNING A DEATH ZONE INTO A LIFELINE**

The NAT Section presented the “European Green Belt” exhibition on 10th December at the EESC. The exhibition has been prepared together with the European Green Belt Initiative which has contributed the exhibition elements on the Green Belt project. The EESC was able to gather key organizations from the respective countries in order to maintain and develop the Green Belt as an ecological network and a memorial landscape of European history. It demonstrates how a borderline separating Europe for 40 years can be turned into a symbol of common natural and cultural heritage. It is worth keeping the harsh past reality of the iron curtain in our memory in order to make us aware of what we have gained in the past 25 years, a united Europe under the roof of an enlarged European Council on common values, citizens rights and economic development. And it is also worth keeping in mind that it was an active civil society which brought the undemocratic regimes in Eastern Europe to an end and caused the historical wave of revolutions in 1989/1990. Without the movements of citizens, workers and intellectuals in these countries this would not have happened. The fall of the iron curtain demonstrates in the most impressive way the power of civil society! And the EESC is proud to have participated of this movement amongst its members.

The “European Green Belt” is an extraordinary ecological network that has been developed along the former Iron Curtain for more than 12,500 kilometers – from the Barents Sea at the Russian-Norwegian border, along the Baltic Coast, through Central Europe and the Balkans to the Black Sea. The European Green Belt Initiative and the various intergovernmental and inter-regional organizations from the respective countries were able to maintain and develop the Green Belt both as an ecological network and a memorial landscape of European history. It demonstrates how a borderline separating Europe for 40 years can be turned into a symbol of common natural and cultural heritage. It is worth keeping the harsh past reality of the iron curtain in our memory in order to make us aware of what we have gained in the past 25 years, a united Europe under the roof of an enlarged European Council on common values, citizens rights and economic development. And it is also worth keeping in mind that it was an active civil society which brought the undemocratic regimes in Eastern Europe to an end and caused the historical wave of revolutions in 1989/1990. Without the movements of citizens, workers and intellectuals in these countries this would not have happened. The fall of the iron curtain demonstrates in the most impressive way the power of civil society! And the EESC is proud to have participated of this movement amongst its members.

Back in 1989/90 many of us thought that human kind would now enter into a new century of peace and democracy. However, the past 25 years have brought much disappointment. Worldwide we have entered into an era of turbulence and conflicts and new clashes between systems. In the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, dark clouds of a new cold war are looming over Europe. These critical moments is it even more important to commemorate the iron curtain and the values of the citizens’ movement which brought it down. And this is the main objective of this exhibition.

**CREATING SUSTAINABLE PENSIONS FOR WOMEN IN MALTA**

A recent seminar organised by MSV Life, Malta, in collaboration with the National Council of Women heard how the landscape of women’s lives has changed and how this will impact their quality of life in old age. Chaired by Grace Attard, EESC Group III member and President of the Malta Cottonera Resource Centre, Dr. Joann Cutajar explained that women had to become more conscious of what would impact their income in old age and because of the nature of their roles as wives and mothers, they had to become more positively selfish to ensure they don’t have to rely on their children to live through old age.

MSV Life CEO David G. Caruana said: “It is about time we replace the terms First Pillar, Second Pillar and Third Pillar pension schemes and start talking about savings. People have to realise that having a dignified income when you grow older is not an automatic given that someone puts away for you, but is something you must strive to achieve and you must start to work on as soon as possible.” The point was confirmed by MSV Life Chief Officer for Business Development Stuart Fairbairn who said that since State Pensions are under pressure, individuals need to take personal financial responsibility to avoid anxiety in old age, and to live in dignity rather than just survive. He said most people can’t figure out how much money they would actually need to maintain their standard of living.

Gusta Arca, EESC, member of Group III, Vice President of the European Platform for Persons with Disability, addressed the needs of vulnerable groups like people with disability and those who care for them. “To get a decent pension, you need a decent job in the first place. For this to happen, legislation needs to be in place to curb discrimination and secure accessibility and availability of good jobs for disabled people. Policy-makers and NGOs can go a long way to improve circumstances for persons with disabilities. Over and above that, you need an adequate social security system”, she said. Finance Minister Edward Scicluna said that the government was offering incentives for women to join the workforce: This included improved maternity leave and childcare benefits, also available to the self-employed. He said that changing the tax bands meant a better return for the economy and the more a family earns the more government will compensate. He said even single parents could now choose to regularize their employment without losing their benefits.

In conclusion, NCW President Mary Gaerty spoke about the initiatives that the Council of Women has been carrying out over the years to ensure decent employment for women and to narrow the pay gap. She also spoke about the Budget 2015 Proposals to address sustainable pensions for women submitted to the Minister of Finance.
At its plenary session on 10-11 December 2014 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.

**Ludwig JORECZ (CZ) – CCMI/123** "Contribution of the woodworking sector to the carbon balance" (EESC opinion 2767/2014)

In this own-initiative opinion, the EESC invites Member States to explore all opportunities related to using wood as an environmentally-friendly material in order to boost the competitiveness of this sector, promote employment and support investment in research and innovation. It also calls on the European Commission to draw up European guidelines on wood supply in order to increase wood supply and promote sustainability of wood sources. Resource efficiency principles should be included. The recommendations set out in the Good practice guidance on the sustainable mobilisation of wood in Europe (2010) should be taken into consideration and, if necessary, developed.

The Committee recalls the importance of excluding “pallets and recovered post-consumer wood” from the definition of “forestry biomass.” The EESC asks the EU Commission to introduce a norm that properly reflects the acoustic characteristics of enclosed spaces, given that wood can play an essential role in acoustic insulation. In fact wood has the capacity to insulate rooms acoustically from external noises and to reduce reverberation time. Opportunities related to wood applications should be explored. The Committee would like to see the Member States and interested stakeholders define national action plans designed to enhance the use wood in buildings and green infrastructures. Local authorities should be directly involved in the implementation of these action plans. Recognising that wood does not enjoy the same familiarity among builders and architects as other materials, the EESC invites Member States to set up initiatives in order to promote wood use. Moreover, the Committee would like to see the support of the European woodworking industries and the European social partners to define coordinated national campaigns in order to give a more attractive image of the sector.

**Mall HELLAM (EE) – REX/400** "Civil Society in Russia" (EESC opinion 3960/2014)

In the current political situation building mutual trust and ensuring that Russia and EU civil society can interact freely, and providing as much support as possible to Russian independent civil society organisations (CSOs) has never been more important. The Human Rights and Democracy Framework should be promoted more actively, and the political role of CSOs should be strengthened. The Human Rights and Democracy Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.

The EU and Russia should coordinate and speak with one voice, addressing the issue of political challenges as well as the crackdown on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and media in Russia. The EESC encourages the EU to closely monitor and regularly comment on various aspects of the civil society situation in Russia.

Processing EU-Russia civil society cooperation as a potential part of the future PCA, and providing a separate funding line for the independent EU-Russia civil society dialogue platform might also be a good idea. Despite the many political and historical, as well as cultural, differences, it is important to understand the differences in opinion and national traditions. This is the basis for the development of a broad and proper understanding of the Russian people. This means that the Russian people are open to dialogue and have been doing so for many years.

On 10 February 2015, the various Intergroups will go on a field visit to Ypres to mark the centenary of the First World War. This visit will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Ypres and the end of the First World War. The visit will include the laying of a wreath at the Menin Gate, the grave of unknown soldiers, and a visit to the Tyne Cot Cemetery. Following the presentation, members will have the possibility to pose questions.

On 17 February 2015, Michel Joffre will deliver an address of remembrance at the closing of the event.

The Menin Gate at Ypres.

In keeping with a new innovation introduced last year, experts from various fields of experience are invited to address our Group meetings on important and controversial topics of current interest to inform our members, provoke debate and facilitate an exchange of ideas.

On Wednesday 10 December 2014, we welcomed two representatives from the Brussels Office underlined the fact that

**Peter MAHRENHOLTZ (DE) – ECON/590** "The EU and the Russian Federation: A partnership for more large-scale exchanges in the field of education and science" (EESC opinion 1468/2014)

Correcting the shortcomings and loopholes in the taxation policy entails taking more ambitious steps within the Member States. In this context, the EESC supports the idea of introducing a solid, broad-based tax on financial transactions, tax havens, consumption of non-renewable energies (limited to those that have registered price falls in recent years), a temporary levy on balance of payments surpluses of more than 6% of GDP, emission of joint bonds and a share of seigniorage income from issuing currency.

Amend the current fiscal decision-making model in the euro area, bringing in more room for fiscal decision-making.

**Carlos TRÁSOS PINTO (ES) – ECO/363** "Completing EMU – The role of taxation policy" (EESC opinion 1468/2014)

The EESC therefore proposes a raft of measures the main ones being:

- Create a "Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base" in the EU, with a fairer setting of parameters than in the current Commission proposal and considering the progress achieved by the OECD.
- Respond to global developments at OECD and G20 level on base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) to ensure that tax regimes are transparent and do not give unfair tax concessions, and urgently eliminate practices used in the Member States that grant selected corporations special tax privileges. Tax should be captured where the economic substance is located.
- Involve citizens in combating the black economy, tax evasion and tax fraud by encouraging the private sector to reinforce instruments such as service vouchers, forms of electronic payment that leave a trace and cooperation with the authorities at these ends.
- Achieve specific fiscal capacity in the euro area, through income based taxes on financial transactions, tax havens, consumption of non-renewable energies (limited to those that have registered price falls in recent years), a temporary levy on balance of payments surpluses of more than 6% of GDP, emission of joint bonds and a share of seigniorage income from issuing currency.

Networks do not enjoy the same familiarity among builders and architects as other materials, the EESC invites Member States to set up initiatives in order to promote wood use. Moreover, the Committee would like to see the support of the European woodworking industries and the European social partners to define coordinated national campaigns in order to give a more attractive image of the sector.

**Roman HAKEN (CZ) – ECO/366** "Community Led Local Development: The role of taxation policy 2014-2020 for local, rural, urban and peri-urban development" (EESC opinion 3715/2014)

CLLD constitutes a combination of representative and participatory democracy: an instrument that representatives of public administration can use to collaborate in partnership with organised civil society and the public. It has the capacity to mobilise and involve local communities and organisations. It also fosters territorial cohesion, enhancing circular policies; it is also relatively well-managed, including in relations with non-EU partners and provides long-term growth through effective use of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) with a link to businesses and with the stress on community-led activities in climate change and sustainability in line with the Europe 2020 strategy.

The Committee underlines that the social and economic partners and organised civil society have to be more involved in CLLD, bringing in building projects with a view to reducing and standardising the number of different ranges of factors, extending tax bases, aligning tax rates more closely, and strengthening cooperation and information exchange mechanisms in order to combat fraud and evasion.

The EESC therefore proposes a raft of measures the main ones being:

- Enlarging the EESC-Russia follow-up committee with other stakeholders, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and public procurement. The EESC therefore proposes a raft of measures the main ones being:
- Establishing and developing contacts with a broad spectrum of NGOs, environmentalists, consumer associations, various social partners, as well as other independent professional interest organisations, etc.
- Appropriate steps to facilitate and liberalise visas should be taken on the basis of certain conditions.
- In the EESC Co-Rapporteur for relations to people-to-people contacts and in particular for more large-scale exchanges in the field of education and intercultural dialogue as a tool to improve mutual understanding and confidence building, including beyond the circle of political stakeholders. Effective cooperation between civil society organisations from the EU and Russia should thrive. The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (similar to the Eastern Partnership CSF) might be considered as one of the existing development platforms that are well suited for this purpose. Involvement of the social partners also merits attention within this or a similar platform.

The EESC and Russian independent civil society organisations should look into ways of enriching human rights dialogue between the EU and Russia and finding new avenues for continued dialogue. In order to strengthen interaction between European and Russian civil society, the following steps should be taken:

- Consider enrolling the EESC-Russia follow-up committee with the objective of creating an opportunity for more members to participate in the exchanges with Russian partners;
- Strengthen the cooperation between the EESC and the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum;
- Establish and develop contacts with a broad spectrum of independent social partners (e.g. employers’ associations and trade unions) in Russia.

In conclusion, the EESC considers it absolutely essential to stick to the basic principles of the CLLD method. Properly balanced partnerships that involve the local community must be a pre-condition for genuine growth. An effective and control system has to be engineered to counter abuse of the CLLD principle.

**Gerd WOLF (DE) – INT/749** "Research and innovation as sources of renewed growth" (EESC opinion 4694/2014)

The Committee strongly supports the objective set by the Commission, as well as the proposed measures to achieve it, in the view of the Committee to leverage Member State policy in this area, the Committee appeals to the good will, constructive attitude and decision-making power of all the relevant players to prioritise this urgent task, and to bring it to the attention of the broader public.

The Committee, view, the following tasks should be given priority:

- Build and strengthen excellent R&D and capacity investment.
- Foster a social dialogue that promotes, welcomes and rewards innovation, and identify, mitigate or remove administrative, economic and social obstacles.
- Provide sufficient support and protection for SMEs and enterprises in the social economy as a key pillar of any effective innovation policy;
- Complete the European Research and Innovation Area, and create an attractive and stable European labour market for researchers, and at last effectively tackle the special social disadvantages of mobility.

**Dr. Daniel Schwaab, responsible for and co-author of the report, started by underlining intergovernmental cooperation will be vital to achieving Social Justice, measured in the report via six indexes: poverty prevention, equitable education, labour market access, social cohesion and security, anti-discrimination and integration.** The report shows a very mixed picture with individual EU member States’ strengths and weaknesses, however it is clear that the gap between Nordic and South European country’s has narrowed significantly in recent years. 2008-2014 and determined increases with austerity measures affecting especially young people and children.

He concluded the warning of the fact that economic prosperity is an important factor but it does not necessarily lead to Social Justice. The integration project can be threatened in case of social divides between member States and generations continue.

**Dr. Andrej Stubiček** from the Brussels Office underlined the fact that the Bertelsmann Foundation intends to pursue and deepen the research on looking at what EU members can do to contribute to a partnership in years to come on the following: fiscal responsibility, investment and structural reforms in order to score their activities on the basis of the indicators. **NOTE: The complete texts of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee’s website: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?view=en_opinions-search**

**Gerd WOLF (DE) – INT/749** "Research and innovation as sources of renewed growth" (EESC opinion 4694/2014)