On 8 February 2012, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Regulation on a European Foundation Statute. One may ask why we need yet more EU company legislation? The answer is simple: While goods, services and people can now move with relative ease across borders in the EU, the same cannot be said for resources and actions for public benefit. The European Foundation Statute would remedy this situation. This simple legal tool could significantly increase resources for improving the lives of ordinary European citizens.

The EESC is now preparing an own-initiative opinion on what such a statute should look like while national governments and members of the European Parliament are starting their review of the matter. The EESC has highlighted in a previous opinion the significant contribution of foundations in many areas. It is estimated that there some 110,000 foundations in Europe, collectively spending over 100 billion euros annually on projects and programmes, and providing employment to up to one million Europeans. Foundations are also playing a key role in helping to achieve the goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth set by the Europe 2020 strategy.

The sector is growing as is the interest among foundations to work beyond national boundaries to address cross-border issues including migration, health, socio-economic development and employment, scientific excellence, the environment, and many more. However, the evidence shows that many foundations encounter numerous obstacles when they want to operate outside their national borders.

The Statute will not replace existing national foundation laws, but will act as an optional and complementary tool. It will reduce costs and uncertainty for public benefit foundations working across borders by providing one single set of rules to create European Foundations. The new Regulation should also strike a balance between easy access to the Statute in terms of formation, and trustworthiness in terms of transparency and accountability.

The need to get the Statute on track is self-evident, especially at a time of socio-economic and political turmoil, when every cent counts and when all actors, including foundations, should have the adequate tools to maximise their impact for the benefit of society.

"Europe's crisis is political, and it requires political solutions!" This is the unanimous and ringing message that was contained in the various declarations made by the heads of the major European institutions at the beginning of September.

Today, three facts clearly point in this direction. Firstly there is President Barroso's excellent State of the Union address to the European Parliament, in which he stated categorically that Europe's challenges required greater unity and solidarity, which implies further integration in the sense that integration depends on having more democracy at European level. Outlining a clear roadmap for the full range of sectorial and general priorities, he called for a clear possibility of revision of the treaties, towards a more complete federation of 27 Member States.

The second element is the presentation, announced by the European Commission, of a package of measures to strengthen banking supervision in the euro area, providing an explicit transfer of competence from the national level to the ECB, leading to the creation of a European Banking Union.

The third is the much anticipated decision of the German Constitutional Court, which must be praised for its pro-European spirit and for giving the go-ahead to the complex European counter-offensive operation against international speculation, which had already been in evidence in the excellent decision taken in early September by the European Central Bank, showing great determination and autonomy. But this decision should also be remembered because it reaffirmed the vital need for parliamentary control of joint decisions, to comply with the shape and substance of our democracies.

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The need to get the Statute on track is self-evident, especially at a time of socio-economic and political turmoil, when every cent counts and when all actors, including foundations, should have the adequate tools to maximise their impact for the benefit of society.
This last point mentioned above seems to be the most important, in part because it takes into account the fact that all our countries are currently experiencing a sweeping and real social emergency that threatens the survival of the same social pact on which our democracies are based. It is also important because, as was highlighted by the Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti in a joint statement with President Van Rompuy, there is a growing populist anti-European voice rising in all our countries, a division between northern and southern Europe, and a return to national prejudices that are fed by growing resentment against the stringent austerity measures that have been implemented in many countries over the past three years. Precisely for this reason, the two leaders publicly agreed on the need to hold a European Summit of Heads of State and Government in the very near future, to tackle seriously the virus of populism that feeds base fears and prejudices, which could lead to the disintegration of the Union.

We couldn’t agree more. Moreover, this “momentum” is demonstrated by the fact that the issue of Europe’s future is becoming increasingly central in all national debates, and also, in an unprecedented way, in recent national election campaigns. This was the case in the Greek elections, as well as in France, Finland and the Netherlands, and I aim sure it will also be true of the upcoming elections in Italy and Germany.

But I think a final note is necessary. Greater integration and the transfer of major powers to the European institutions are the way ahead; this is still the subject of evident and strong controversy, but is historically absolutely necessary. This requires more guidance and control by the European Parliament, in cooperation with national parliaments. This is representative democracy, the basis of our democratic system, as enshrined in Articles 10 and 12 of the current Treaty on European Union.

In the current Treaty, alongside those two articles, Article 11 sets out the scope of participatory democracy and, in particular, what we call European civil dialogue. In this regard, a recent EESC opinion, of which I am the rapporteur and promoter, and which was approved unanimously by the Committee’s Social Affairs Section and is due for adoption at one of the EESC’s upcoming plenary sessions, establishes a clear and precise roadmap for the full, urgent and opportune application of Article 11, for the sustained development of European civil dialogue, in its scope, shape, structure and continuity.

These are proposals that we can begin to put into practice during the coming months so that 2013, the European Year of Citizenship, will ultimately provide an opportunity to carry out the broad debate on the future of Europe under the parameters of participatory democracy.

We want to say clearly to Messrs Barroso, Van Rompuy, Monti and Schultz and all those who are moving positively in the right direction for Europe that now is the time to make a decisive step forward in building a solid basis for European civil dialogue and that each EU institution must play its full part. The EESC has been working for a number of years on this front. The Compendium and the Roadmap published by Group III in the recent past are evidence of our strongly proactive involvement. The Committee is called upon, more than others, to face the challenge in both the national and European public arenas, and has the required knowledge, network and strength to do so.

The political solutions that Europe badly needs today cannot be pushed onto the shoulders of its citizens, and that is why we have two forms of democracy, representative and participatory – we must make use of these and strengthen them significantly.


“The moment of truth has arrived”

Doug Larson (1926 - )
American author and journalist

Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

**MAUREEN O’NEILL (UK)**
VICE PRESIDENT OF GROUP III

**‘BOOSTING RETIREMENT SAVINGS ACROSS EUROPE’**

This meeting organised in the EESC by the International Longevity Centre was hosted by the EESC on 18th June and was attended by 40 people drawn from a range of organisations across Europe which represented the pensions and savings industries, EU Commission, European Parliament and age related organisations. The event was introduced by Maureen O’Neill, Vice President of Group II and Xavier Verboven, Group II and Vice President of the Labour Market Observatory, presented the EESC opinion on the White Paper on Sustainable Pensions which was being drawn up by the EESC. The aim of the event was to highlight the broad pensions/retirement savings context across Europe, explore pension in the context of the economic crisis, consider the EU White Paper and debate potential social change. The outcomes of the meeting would be included in a report produced by the ILC. The ILC is a member of the International Longevity Global Alliance which aims to help societies to address longevity and population ageing in positive and productive ways using the life course approach, highlighting older people’s productivity and contribution to family and society as a whole.

http://www.ilcuk.org.uk

**‘TACKLING CHILD POVERTY- GOOD PRACTICE SHAPING POLICY’**

This seminar was organised by Caritas Europa and hosted by the EESC to launch its report on “Changing the Life Path of Children in Poverty across Europe. The EESC hosted this event which was chaired by Maureen O’Neill, Vice President of Group III.

Keynote speakers included representatives from the EU Commission, European Parliament, the Cyprus Presidency, an eyewitness account of child poverty in Greece. These presentations were followed by interventions from Caritas workers from different Member States setting out good practice and then a panel discussion. It was a very full programme and the issues raised and debated was a reflection of the work undertaken during the EU Year on Poverty in relation to child poverty (Mrs King, Group I was the rapporteur).

**CARITAS SUMMER UNIVERSITY – LEUVEN**

Maureen O’Neill was invited to give a presentation to this group of Caritas Members who came from across Europe. The theme of the University was ‘Care and Migration’ and the sessions covered child poverty, migration, age, mental health, project management and communication. It was a very stimulating event and a great opportunity to discuss a range of issues from the perspective of those who provide services in different circumstances.

**MICHAEL SMYTH (UK)**
PRESIDENT OF THE ECO SECTION
MEMBER OF GROUP III

**‘REТИRING INTO ACTION’**

This was a roundtable event was jointly organised by the EESC, Edinburgh University and the EU Parliament Office in Edinburgh. The aim was to consider the economic and social contributions made by older people to our societies. The 20 invited participants represented a range of organisations from different Member States. The event provided an opportunity to debate issues in small groups, to share ideas and to formulate a series of actions to be taken forward. The keynote speaker was Michael Smyth (UK), the EESC ECO President and the content of the discussion contributes to the opinion being written by Maureen O’Neill on the ‘Participation of Older People in Society’ as part of the EESC’s work during the EU Year on Active Ageing.
On 3 October 2012, the Various Interests Group will organise a conference at the EESC on the topic ‘Social Enterprises and the Europe 2020 Strategy: innovative solutions for a sustainable Europe’. Within the general framework of the 2012 UN International Year of Cooperatives, the objective of the event of the Various Interests Group is to actively support social enterprises as significant actors in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy and of the Single Market. Particularly in the current period of economic and social crises, social enterprises are able to bring innovative solutions for social cohesion and inclusion, job creation, growth and the promotion of active citizenship. It is precisely the positive impact of social enterprises on society, the environment and communities which can contribute to implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy and the aim of the Single Market Act for a ‘highly competitive social market economy’.

However, unless a level-playing field for social enterprises is established, with legal, administrative and financial instruments conducive to the development of the sector, the potential of social enterprises will not be unleashed. It is within this context that the Various Interests Group hopes to raise awareness of the importance of the sector and to examine avenues for enhancing its impact, within both Europe and at the international level. The conference will be organised in close cooperation with the Social Economy Category (http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?l=portal.en.social-economy-category) and will bring together approximately 150 participants, including Group III members, wider civil society representatives and guest speakers. Moreover, the event will clearly provide the opportunity to raise the visibility of EESC Opinions and of the work of the Committee at large.

Highlights of the July 2012 EESC Plenary Session

Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Mrs MADER (FR) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: “A European Consumer Agenda – Boosting confidence and growth” – INT/649.

Mr PALMGREN (FI) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: “Report on Competition Policy 2011” – INT/650.

Mr HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “The internal market and State aid for the regions” – INT/653.

Mr KRAUSE (ES) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Direct sellers: the specific case of economically independent self-employed workers” – INT/654.

Mrs FEDERSPIEL (BA) is the Rapporteur for the additional opinion on: “The Single Market Act – identifying missing measures” – INT/OMU/655.

Mr PEGADO LIZ (PT) is the Rapporteur for the information opinion on: “Better regulation: implementing acts and delegated acts” – INT/656.

Mrs MADER (FR) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Recovery and resolution of credit institutions and investment firms” – ECO/333.

Mr PATER (PL) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Ten years on, where is the euro headed? (The EU’s economic and political future and the new Treaty)” – ECO/334.

Mr LUCAN (RO) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “The EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012–2016” – SOC/467.

Mrs ROBERT (SE) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: “European social label” – SOC/468.

Mr TRANTINA (IC) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Job creation through apprenticeships and lifelong vocational training: the role of business in education in the EU” – SOC/469.

Mr BALON (PL) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Employee influence and participation as a pillar of sound business management in Europe and balanced approaches to overcoming the crisis” – SOC/470.

Mrs ATTARD (MT) is the Co-Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: “The gender dimension in the Europe 2020 strategy” – SOC/471.

Mr SCHÜTER (DE) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: “European Year of Mental Health – better work, better quality of life” – SOC/472.

Mr GOFAS (EL) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Nautical industries: restructuring accelerated by the crisis” – COM/103.

Mr JIROVEC (CZ) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Sustainable growth business models, low-carbon economy and industrial change” – EMC/104.

Mr SOMVILLE (BE) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: “Civil society’s contribution to a strategy for prevention and reduction of food losses and food waste” – NAT/570.

Mrs SLAVOVA (BG) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “The current state of commercial relations between food suppliers and the large retail sector” – NAT/571.

Mr STERN (SK) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Roadworthiness tests of motor vehicles” – TEN/491.

Mr MACHELEVICIUS (LT) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “The quality of rail services in the EU” – TEN/495.

Mr TRANTINA (IC) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “A European approach for overcoming the crisis” – SOC/470.

Mr MACHELEVICIUS (LT) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: “Safeguarding the right to a quality education in the EU” – SOC/469.

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The ‘Consumers and Environment Category’ will hold a meeting on Friday 5 October 2012 to discuss, amongst other points, the organisation of the 2013 edition of the European Consumers Day. The draft agenda will be available shortly on the Group III website.

The ‘Social Economy Category’ will hold a meeting on Monday 8 October 2012 to discuss social innovation and local development, with Mr Roberto di Meglio, Senior Specialist of the ILO as keynote speaker. Professor Monzon of the research centre CIRIEC, will also present the EESC’s commissioned study on the Social Economy in the EU.

The ‘Farmers’ Category’ will hold a meeting on Thursday 25 October 2012. The draft agenda will be available shortly on the Group III website.

The ‘SMEs/Crafts/Liberal Professionals’ will hold a meeting on Friday 26 October 2012. Mrs Maart Nyman from DG ENTRE.E - SME Policy Development and Crafts – will make a presentation covering the SME definition, the Entrepreneurship Act 2020 and the Entrepreneurship Action Plan. The draft agenda will be available shortly on the Group III website.

To find out more about the categories and their members, please go to: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?l=portal.en.group-3-new-study-groups
At its plenary session on 11-12 July the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is examining proposals for a programme under which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.

KÖZÖSSL Ingrid (SE) – EESC/1582 “Anti-drug measures: should we focus more on prevention or on combat measures?”

The EESC highlights that health is a high priority for Europe citizens, and that the health systems in the EU should be available to all patients in all Member States. The EESC welcomes the time limits of 120 days proposed by the Commission and the possibility of using national health assessment programmes. The EESC considers that health insurance companies have an increasing role and influence. Therefore, their activities should be reviewed by the Member States on regular basis. Finally, the EESC urges that decisions on price freeze, price reductions and price approval should be based on transparent and objective criteria, implementation of which should be monitored by the Commission.

CRISTIAN PÎRVULESCU (RO) – SOC/442 “Enhanced intra-EU solidarity in the field of asylum” - An EU agenda for better responsibility-sharing and more maintenance of solidarity

In this opinion, the Committee considers that the principle of solidarity should continue to be the cornerstone of European asylum policy. The member states are equal partners in the sharing of responsibility. The number of member states varies with the number of asylum seekers. The member states with a higher number of asylum seekers should be supported by other member states. The EESC notes that the European asylum support system (EASS) is still insufficiently developed, and that the asylum support system in the EU as a whole is not yet able to handle the challenges of asylum. The EESC welcomes the call for a more coordinated approach to asylum, and the Commission’s ambition to integrate the EASS into a European solidarity fund, and to ensure that the fund is more responsive to the needs of the member states.

DE LAMAIZE Eduoard (FR) – SOC/454 “Establishing the European strategy for the fight against organised crime”

In this opinion, the EESC welcomes the Commission’s proposal to establish the European strategy for the fight against organised crime. The EESC notes that the strategy should be based on the principles of cooperation and solidarity, and that the strategy should be implemented by the Member States and Eurojust. The EESC welcomes the time limits of 120 days proposed by the Commission.

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TRÍAS PINTO Carlos (ES) – NAT/451 “Cooperatives and the agri-food development”

In this own-initiative opinion, the EESC states that, as well as pushing providers and consumers further electric, a holistic approach should be used in order to ensure the transparency of the operations they encompass, so that production and consumption can be seen as a single process. The EESC welcomes the proposal for the exchange of good practices between professionals in the agri-food sector, and calls for it to be removed immediately.

The Committee welcomes the Commission’s proposal but feels that it should be made clear in relation to the first objective that fisheries and aquaculture should be sustainable and competitive from an environmental point of view. The EESC also regrets the fact that there is no specific reference in the objectives of the EMFF to the need for enhanced data processing and marketing sector for fisheries and aquaculture. The EESC supports the proposal of the Commission to establish an index of overcapacity in the fleet wherever it may exist. The EESC also considers that support for the permanent cessation of fishing activities in its entirety is a strategy of great importance to support for fostering relations and partnerships with an external dimension, and also for tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and social dialogue, facilitating diversification and job creation and improving safety on board. It also sees a need to introduce measures aimed at bringing down the cost of fishing and to help mitigate the lack of transfer between generations, and to focus more on creating and maintaining jobs. The EESC endorses support for the implementation of conservation measures in the CFP; for limiting the impact of fishing on the marine environment; for innovation; for protecting and restoring marine biodiversity and ecosystems; for mitigating climate change; for improving the use of unwanted catches; and for increasing energy efficiency.

KRAUZE Armands (LV) – NAT/560 “Promotion measures and information provision for agricultural products: a reinforced value-added European strategy for strengthening the tastes of Europe”

The EESC supports the two fundamental aims of the new initiative: the provision of more detailed information and awareness on the EU market, and export promotion on the external market. The Committee considers it crucial to establish a standardised set of criteria for calls for projects that can be given to public entities and refer to the information and awareness on the EU market. In this regard, the EESC welcomes the proposal to present a multiannual framework with detailed information for the preparation and implementation of the information programme.

The concept of EU origin could be conveyed through umbrella slogans that do not jeopardise the consumer’s right to be properly informed. The EESC advocates a single list of eligible products, which should be extended to products within other quality schemes that deliver the European quality message. Regarding the possibility of extending the concept to a multi-country approach, the EESC supports this approach and suggests that the Commission should increase its contribution, especially where emerging markets are involved.

KALLO Seppe (FR) – NAT/561 “A multi-annual plan for the cod stocks in the Baltic Sea and the fisheries exploiting those stocks”

In this opinion, the EESC welcomes the success of the plan for the Baltic cod stocks and feels that it is important that the plan be extended and that the proposed amendments (proposals 2, 3 and 4) are acceptable and necessary technical changes to comply with the requirements of the CFP. The EESC welcomes the legislative power of the Commission to determine fishing mortality rates, as proposed in Articles 27 and 29. The EESC considers that it is important that the Commission (Council) and the European Parliament (EP) reach a political agreement that has a 43(3) TEU and suggests that if this is the Commission is delegated the power to change the target fishing mortality rate, on which basis catch quotas have been established in the short term, lead to rapid change in catch quotas that would be damaging to the fishing industry.

PICHENOT Evelyne (FR) – RDX/399 “The EU relations with Moldova. What role for organised civil society?”

In this own-initiative opinion, the EESC welcomes the launching of the European Union accession negotiations and it underlines the importance of continued efforts towards successful negotiations. The EESC welcomes the Comprehensive Free Trade and it advocates that a balanced agreement on DCFTA is reached and that civil society organisations are involved at every stage and that the Commission is prepared to ensure for an effective participation of Moldovan citizens in the public consultation launched by the Commission and in civil society hearings and meetings, which are part of the sustainability impact assessment, and for regular briefings on the content of the negotiations. The EESC welcomes as an important step in the progress of the Social and Environmental Council (MESC) based on existing experience within the EU or under the neighbourhood arrangements. It also considers that the Commission should implement the implementing agreements with the EU in the energy and research fields, developing expertise on ecological approaches, stepping up efforts against deforestation and forest fires, and facilitating access to the labour market for young people and women and their capacity to contribute further development of the Moldovan society.