Editorial

Dear Reader,

The next two years will be crucial for Europe and its citizens. Apart from the historical financial crisis we are facing now, Europe will have a new Commission, a new Parliament, hopefully a new Treaty. We will have to discuss the new Lisbon strategy and issues of great importance for European citizens and for our future. For our Committee, this means that we will have to face a moving context, we have to keep a high profile and communication will have an overriding importance.

As Vice-President for Communication, I want to focus on the following five actions which are all building upon the work of our predecessors. First, we have to continue developing our contacts with the other institutions. Within the context of the Inter-institutional Group on Information, we have already met with Commission Vice-President Margot Wallström, the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Alejandro Vidal Quadras, as well as with the French Minister for European Affairs, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, to discuss the priorities for communication in 2009 — the year of Creativity and Innovation:

- Energy and Climate Change
- The June 2009, EP elections
- 20 years since the fall of the Iron Curtain, and
- Growth, jobs & economic stability

Second, we need to step up contacts with journalists and the media in Brussels, as well as at home in our respective countries. Third, we need timely, fresh, lively, targeted, active and interactive communication. The tools, resources and professional support for this exist. Fourth, we need to have a strategic plan and communicate on selected subjects taking into account our President’s priorities as well as current events and topics. Last but not least, communication has to be a joint effort: we need to bring together EESC members and the secretariat, the groups, sections and the communication team.

With this in mind I will be meeting the groups, sections and other bodies, such as the CCMI, to identify our communication priorities.

I will dedicate myself with enthusiasm, energy and responsibility to pursuing our common goals. Together and with your help we can do it!

Irini Pari,
EESC Vice-President for Communication

Diary Dates

22 and 23 January 2009
EESC, conference on ‘Financial Markets’ organised jointly by the EESC and ETUC

26 January 2009
EESC, conference on ‘The view of European civil society on nuclear energy’

27 January 2009
EESC, seminar: ‘Communicating Europe in partnership, beyond borders and cultures’

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7 No Solidarity, no Wealth

Mr Mario Sepi — New President of the EESC praises Solidarity

In the middle of the French Presidency of the EU, the European Economic and Social Committee, at its plenary session of 22 October 2008, elected Mr Mario Sepi President of the EESC for the period 2008-2010. Mr Mario Sepi comes from the Employees’ Group in which he was President for the period 2006-2008.

The new President comes at a crucial moment for Europe and for the rest of the world.

The financial crisis is strongly knocking the door of all the European citizens and countries. Europe must prove to its citizens and moreover to the rest of the world that the leaders of this entity composed by 27 countries is capable to react accordingly in order to face this crisis and more particularly to protect its citizens offering them solutions and inspiring trust.

The key theme of the new President of the EESC ‘rights and solidarity to guide globalisation’ may be a part of the solution to face this globalised financial crisis.

During this critical phase, Europe must show this kind of ‘Solidarity’ to its citizens.

Solidarity is not confronted with Globalisation but on the contrary provides the right tools to the concerned to face it.

The new President says: Globalisation is an ongoing process, while solidarity is the set of actions and objectives which

Debate on rights and solidarity to guide globalisation

A major challenge for Europe: promoting growth and tackling the crisis while rethinking the European social model

The new challenges presented by the economic and social situation in the European Union were the subject of a new debate held at the European Parliament on 22 October 2008 on ‘Rights and solidarity to guide globalisation’, on the occasion of Mario Sepi’s election as President of the European Economic and Social Committee. He stated that ‘the European social model, with its wealth of rights, guarantees and solidarity, is the only response when it comes to relaunching a competitive model for development. Speaking at the plenary session, Vladimir Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, emphasised the importance of developing cooperation between the European Commission and the EESC on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. Maria João Rodrigues, professor at Lisbon’s ISCTE University Institute, and mother of the Lisbon Strategy, mentioned that the aim of Lisbon had always been to combine greater competitiveness with more jobs and better social cohesion. Today she added, it is important to pursue growth and respond to this structural crisis with structural changes. Mr Emilio Gabaglio, chairman of the Employment Committee, also addressed the plenary session, stating that it was essential...
Civil society must be more closely involved in the Union for the Mediterranean

From 14 to 16 October 2008, the economic and social councils and similar institutions of the Euromed region met in Rabat at the Euromed Summit. This summit was organised jointly by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and Morocco’s civil society organisations, with the support of the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the European Commission.

Issues of key importance at the heart of the debate

One of the recommendations adopted at the summit concerned the social aspect of relations between the EU and its partner countries. The network recommended that all initiatives, programmes and projects implemented as part of Mediterranean policies should take account of the social aspect, a factor that is crucial for the partner countries’ sustainable development.

In addition to the social aspect raised at the Rabat Summit, other themes of great importance to civil society in the region were addressed, such as the prospects of a free trade area in 2010, women’s access to economic and social life, intercultural dialogue, freedom of association and stronger consultative bodies in the region.

Union for the Mediterranean

The session on the role of civil society in the Union for the Mediterranean gave rise to a lively discussion and solid recommendations were made. The network of economic and social councils and similar institutions proposed that it could play a key role in designating, promoting and following up projects for the Union for the Mediterranean and called for the network to be properly represented in the Union for the Mediterranean’s bodies.

At the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Marseilles on 3 and 4 November 2008, Ms Le Nouail Mariére, who was recently appointed President of the EESC Euromed Follow-up Committee, presented the recommendations of the network of economic and social councils and similar institutions, in implementing projects for the Union for the Mediterranean.

For information:

The 1995 Barcelona Declaration entrusted the European Economic and Social Committee with the task of forging links with its counterparts in the Euro-Mediterranean region in order to establish closer relations with organised civil society and thus help to strengthen the Barcelona process.

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Mr Mario Sepi — New President of the EESC Praises Solidarity

by the Lisbon Treaty and, last but not least, Rights and the European Social Model.

In the same plenary, the two vice presidents of the EESC have been elected. Ms Irini Pari from the Employers’ Group and Mr Seppo Kallio from the Committee’s Various interests Group. Ms Irini Pari will be responsible for the Communication Group and Mr Seppo Kallio for the Budget Group of the EESC.

Both the President and the Vice-Presidents will be in office from 2008 to 2010.

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Debate on rights and and solidarity to guide globalisation

make it possible to realise the potential inherent in economic and social development: the growth of civilisation and equality for all.

The three main priorities of the new President of the EESC, Mr Mario Sepi, during his mandate will be the Lisbon strategy; the Participatory Democracy reinforced to take decisive action to ensure that the crisis did not have devastating consequences for employment by setting up a European programme of investment in infrastructure.

The EESC also presented its views through the presidents of its three groups, Henri Malosse, Georgios Dassis and Staffan Nilsson, underlining the growing importance of the Committee’s consultative role in addressing the European Union’s major socioeconomic challenges. Other points raised during this debate included the need to identify a new model for the monetary and financial markets, the importance of taking ethical considerations into account and the European-level supervision of major banks.

EESC info — December 2008 — Special edition

Members’ News

Welcome to our new members

Christoph Lechner

The EESC is glad to announce and welcome Mr Christoph Lechner’s new membership. Austrian, graduated in Law, since the beginning of his career he has worked in the social sector, defending the workers and employees’ rights.

Since 2006, he has been chief secretary and head of the department for constitutional law and general and international social policy of the Lower Austria Workers and Employees Chamber. He is also expert for prevention and health promotion for the project ‘the changing face of disability’ of the Austrian Ministry for Social and Consumer Protection.

Mr Christoph Lechner is now part of Group II (Employees).

Lena Minkova Roussenova

Bulgarian, M.A. and PhD in Economics, she has been Executive Board Member of the National Research Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science since 2007 and Chief Economist and Program Director of the Bulgarian Confederation of Employers and Industrialists since 2006. From 2000 to 2005 she has worked as Chief Economist at the European Institute of Sofia. During her prestigious career, she has also worked for the OECD and the World Bank.

Patrick Seyler

Graduated in International relations, he has been General Manager for Government and Institutional Relations Luxembourg and Country Manager Luxembourg at ArcelorMittal (Luxembourg) since 2006. During his career, Mr Seyler has held senior positions in different editorial, marketing and international multimedia companies. From 1989 to 1994, he has been adviser to the Luxembourg Industry Federation, focusing his work in particular on European and social questions.

Eventually, he has joined the steel industry in 1994 as Management Board Secretary and Head of Communications and External Relations of ARBED SA, Luxembourg.

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Maria João Rodrigues addressing the plenary assembly of the EESC
Introduction

On 22 October 2008, I assumed the responsibility of the Committee presidency with both conviction and determination. My ambition is for the Committee to become a consultative body that is increasingly valued and listened to by the EU institutions. It should be capable of raising awareness of the problems and hopes of civil society, workers and entrepreneurs at European level. My commitment and that of the Vice-Presidents is unwavering.

‘Rights and solidarity to guide globalisation’ is the message of my presidency

This means, first of all, a new concept of solidarity, which has been taking form throughout the course of European history. It implies reciprocity and give and take, care for other people and active sharing. It does not mean some giving and others receiving, and even less is it a matter of pity and compassion, in which some decide and others wait in resignation — it recognises only the sharing of unequal situations in one common project.

Mario Sepi
President of the European Economic and Social Committee

‘Rights and solidarity to guide globalisation’

European social model and solidarity as an instrument for competitiveness

This concept of solidarity does not focus exclusively on quality, an idea of society or a raft of values underpinning our civilisation: it is also a tool to promote competitiveness in the challenging climate of globalisation.

Seen in this light, solidarity is able to force the economy to pick up pace towards a form of development revolving around quality, raising the overall level of economic and social processes, making society more stable and preventing the social and environmental disasters which would result should the pursuit of competitiveness be seen solely in terms of cost control and social conflicts.

The pursuit of solidarity and the European social model does not put us on a collision course with globalisation.

Globalisation is an ongoing process, while solidarity is the set of actions and objectives which make it possible to realise the potential inherent in economic and social development: the growth of civilisation and equality for all.

Summary of the programme 2008–10

The fact that the start of my presidency coincides with the European Economic and Social Committee’s 50th anniversary confers upon me a twofold responsibility: to capitalise on the history of the Committee, while at the same time ensuring that the Committee looks to the future.

The EESC has a key role to play in this respect: as the voice of organised civil society, it is a microcosm and a mirror of social and cultural differences.

It is an institutional forum in which civil society stakeholders propose solutions agreed as part of their consultative role of providing support for the EU’s legislative and executive institutions.
New structure of the EESC for 2008–10

**PRESIDENCY**
The EESC presidency comprises one President and two Vice-Presidents with a two-year term of office

**Vice-President**
Seppo Kallio
(Group III — Various Interests — Finland)
President of the Budget Group

**Vice-President**
Irini Pari
(Group I — Employers — Greece)
President of the Communication Group

**President**
Mario Sepi
(Group II — Employees — Italy)

The EESC is divided into three groups: Employers, Employees and Various Interests

**Group I — Employers**
- President
  Henri Malosse
  France
- Vice-Presidents of Group I
  - Paulo Barros Vale (Portugal)
  - Peter Clever (Germany)
  - Antal Cuszop (Hungary)
  - Sylvia Gauci (Malta)
  - Brenda King (United Kingdom)
  - Jacek Krawczyk (Poland)
  - Thomas McDonogh (Ireland)
  - Eve Paarensond (Estonia)
  - José Isais Rodriguiz Garcia-Caro (Spain)
  - Cvetko Stantich (Slovenia)

**Group II — Employees**
- President
  Georgios Dassis
  Greece
- Vice-Presidents of Group II
  - Andrzej Adamczyk (Poland)
  - Sandy Boyle (United Kingdom)
  - Gérard Dantin (France)
  - Anna Maria Darmanin (Malta)
  - Susanna Florio (Italy)
  - Manfred Schallmeyer (Germany)
  - Victor Hugo Sequeira (Portugal)
  - Dana Stechová (Czech Republic)

**Group III — Various Interests**
- President
  Staffan Nilsson
  Sweden
- Vice-Presidents of Group III
  - Miklós Barabás (Hungary)
  - Luca Jahier (Italy)
  - Mall Hellam (Estonia)

**BUREAU**
The Bureau organises the Committee's operations and proceedings. It has 39 members including the President and the two Vice-Presidents. On specific issues, the Bureau is assisted by ad hoc groups.

**PLenary ASSEMBLY**
The Committee adopts its opinions by simple majority on the basis of section opinions and forwards them to the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. The Committee comprises 344 members.
The Committee comprises six sections as well as the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI), the Single Market Observatory (SMO), the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO), the Labour Market Observatory (LMO) and the Lisbon Strategy Observatory (LSO).

**Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)**

President
János Tóth
Group III
Various Interests
Hungary

**Section for Agricultural, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)**

President
Hans-Joachim Wilms
Group II
Employees
Germany

**Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO)**

President
Stéphane Buffetaut
Group I
Employers
France

**Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI)**

President
Joost van Iersel
Group I
Employers
Netherlands

**Section for External Relations (REX)**

President
Filip Hamro-Drotz
Group I
Employers
Finland

**Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)**

President
Bryan Cassidy
Group I
Employers
United Kingdom

**Labour Market Observatory (LMO)**

President
Josly Piette
Group II
Employees
Belgium

**Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)**

President
Krzysztof Pater
Group III
Various Interests
Poland

**Single Market Observatory (SMO)**

President
Jorge Pegado Liz
Group III
Various Interests
Portugal

**Labour Market Observatory (LMO)**

President
Leila Kurki
Group II
Employees
Finland

**Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO)**

President
Josly Piette
Group II
Employees
Belgium

**Lisbon Strategy Observatory (LSO)**

President
Staffan Nilsson
Group III
Various Interests
Sweden

**QUAESTORS**

David Sears
Group I
Employers
United Kingdom

Daniel Retureau
Group II
Employees
France

Ludvík Jírovec
Group III
Various Interests
Czech Republic
Assessing the consequences of policies on our societies

In order to ensure that the Committee reflects the views of society, we must promote assessments of the real impact of European policies when applied to our societies.

A prerequisite for this is identifying the consequences of European decisions as soon as possible.

Through its members and their organisations, the Committee has access to an excellent network through which it can assess the grassroots impact of directives and European policies and we must ensure that we make proper use of it.

Only in this way will the Committee be able to perform its function not only of supporting the European institutions in their decision-making, but also of providing answers at national and organisational level to the questions: What are the implications of this decision for the various sectors of society? What is the impact on industrial relations? What are the consequences for social and civil progress in individual countries?

Three key priorities

The Treaty of Lisbon includes a series of articles reinforcing participatory democracy.

It is primarily the responsibility of the Committee to explore ways in which these articles may be applied effectively, by stepping up its role in the consultative process, making full use of the popular right of initiative and putting the requirement to consult and inform civil society into practice in secondary legislation.

The deep fault lines running through our society and the breakdown that we are currently witnessing of social pact employers, trade unions and governments make an improvement in the quality of the economic fabric imperative.

The second priority is therefore the Lisbon strategy. This strategy is fundamental: cooperation with the EU institutions to tackle the issues of modernisation, the knowledge-based society, international competition, research and the rights of Europeans as citizens and as workers is key to contributing to the renewal of society.

The time is right to submit new proposals to the institutions, the Member States, the social partners and the other organisations with links to the Committee.

The principle aim of these new proposals is to revitalise European production but this is impossible without better protection of rights and living conditions.

This leads us to the third priority: rights and the European social model — from the struggle to ensure the entry into force of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU to the struggle to ensure its effective application at every level.

The new ‘social pact’ made up of the Charter and the Treaty of Lisbon must become practical policy and the first step towards achieving this is to bring the social agenda up to date. Clarifying labour law and defining the relationship between European and national or contractual provisions is vital if European citizens are to regain legal and social certainty.

Conveying a strong message: the importance of communication

In parallel, the Committee must develop an effective internal and external communication strategy: timeliness, efficiency and policy content must be the watchwords for the official communication activities of a modern Economic and Social Committee.

Tapping into current political debates must be a priority for the Committee, showing that the Committee itself can deal properly and promptly with issues flowing from the institutional debate.

Looking ahead to the EESC after 2008, we must build on its great potential in terms of:

• promoting change in our societies;

• defending the European social model.

My background…

I have been an EESC member since 1995 and I have been inspired by a great commitment to European economic and social policy. Among my key opinions for which I was rapporteur is the 2002 own-initiative opinion on “Trends, structures and institutional mechanisms of the international capital markets”.

My opinion also focused on competition policy, European industrial policy and monetary union, among other things, and I was a member of the study group that prepared the opinion of the Committee on EMU and industrial relations — and the Lisbon strategy.

Since the 1960s, I have followed European issues with particular reference to social and labour matters in Europe and I have been part of the European federalist movement as secretary of the Rome section of the Federalist Youth Movement.

Concerned with social and trade union policy in Europe since 1966, I was a researcher with the Institute of International Affairs (IAI), whose President at the time was Alitero Spinelli. From 1969 to 1974, I worked with the Economic and Social Committee as an expert on relations with the Mediterranean countries. For my first job with this institute, I wrote an essay on the role of the Economic and Social Committee.

As an active trade unionist with the CISL in the 1970s and 1980s, first as an international policy expert and then as National Secretary of the FIM (Italian Metalworkers’ Federation), I have been responsible for industrial and contract policy and a member of the EMF (European Metalworkers’ Federation).

I was also one of those who got the union to sign the Fiat agreement in 1984, which ended the long crisis that had begun as a result of the struggles of 1980.

I have been strongly committed to development cooperation, working on the idea of the social development of civil society at the heart of relations with non-member countries such as Brazil, Chile, Mali and Mozambique.

As I move on from a side role, to which I have belonged throughout my career in the Committee to take on overall responsibility, I am fully aware of the difficulties facing me, but I am heartened by the good relationship I have established with the members of every Committee group.
EU peace-building methods in Northern Ireland must be passed on

by Jane Morrice

‘Ground-breaking and innovative’, is how EESC President Mario Sepi described the EU influence on the peace process in Northern Ireland following the adoption of an own initiative opinion at the EESC Plenary in October. Entitled ‘The role of the EU in the Northern Ireland Peace Process’, the opinion underlines the EU’s duty to pass on the lessons learned from this unique peace-building experience to other conflict regions in the world. It notes, however, that conflict resolution in the region is still “work in progress” and recommends that EU support for community reconciliation continues for the long term. It also calls for consideration to be given to the proposal to create a European centre for conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.

Based on evidence from a fact-finding mission and major conference in Belfast, the Opinion was drawn up by a sub-committee chaired by Henri Malosse who was particularly moved by what he witnessed in the city. The sight of “peace walls” dividing Protestant and Catholic communities was a stark reminder of how much work still needs to be done. Rapporteur, Jane Morrice, hopes others can learn lessons from her homeland.

The Opinion includes a Conflict Resolution Tool Kit designed to be adapted to help other regions facing similar difficulties. It identifies the ways in which the EU influenced positive change by supporting the efforts of civil society, local consultation and the inclusion of all interest groups — political, business, trade union, voluntary sector — using the European Social Partnership Model. This approach allowed more than half the population to take part in EU PEACE programmes in what is seen as unprecedented grass-roots involvement.

But all are agreed that the follow up to the Opinion will be more important than the work already covered. The aim, according to Jane Morrice, is to ensure that the ‘Tool Kit’ is carried in the briefcases of European peace builders wherever they travel.

‘As the world’s greatest ‘role model’ for peace-building, the EU has the expertise, the diversity and the resources to support conflict resolution wherever it is required in the world. But it has more than this. It has a duty to do so and an obligation to place peace-building at the very core of its future strategic direction’.

Giving farmers the ‘freedom to farm’

The CAP, Common Agricultural Policy, is currently facing one of its ‘health checks’. And the EESC, as always, has promptly presented its opinion on the issue.

The EESC considers the CAP one of the backbones of the European Union.

Agriculture plays a major role in many important sectors and issues that are at the top of nowadays’ agenda: climate change, biodiversity, reduction of Green House Gas emission and renewable energies, water management. Today, farmers play an essential multifunctional role: they are the main actors in achieving world high standards for food safety and quality, as well as for environmental protection and animal welfare; ensuring supplies of safe and varied food and of sustainable bio-energy; conserving the countryside and the nature; contributing to employment by keeping up the agricultural production; and last but not least, saving the rural areas from depopulation and abandonment. And all that will remain still valid in future.

According to the Committee, farmers’ multifunctional role has to be preserved and the current CAP “Health Check” should shoot exactly for this aim and, more generally, for giving new responses to the changed food market situation. This would imply adapting the existing legislation towards an easier and more straightforward implementation of the reform measures. Market organization, simplification and adjustment are likely to be the key-tools that, if pursued and accomplished, could lead to the desired ultimate aim, stability.

The EESC believes that an appropriate agricultural policy at EU level will require at least as much funding as before. It calls on politicians to better explain to the public the necessity of the CAP, in order to avoid further never ending discussions about financing.

Eventually, it appeals to the European Commission for a deeper and better analysis of the changes that it has proposed to bring to the individual measures and sections of the CAP, because in some cases (GAEC, decoupling, extension of the tendering system, dairy market, set-aside mechanism, modulation) they might not perfectly fit with the concrete and actual needs of both the European farmers and consumers.

PLENARY SESSION IN A NUTSHELL

Closer relations between Brazilian civil society and the European Union: setting up a round table

On 23 October of this year, the EESC adopted an opinion on EU-Brazil relations, which made a number of recommendations for the new strategic EU-Brazil partnership, formalised in July 2007. The opinion’s main recommendation is to establish an EU-Brazil civil society round table. Along the lines of those already existing with India and China, this new body would help to maintain a permanent dialogue between civil society in Brazil and the European Union.

In partnership with Brazil’s Council for Economic and Social Development, the EESC proposed strengthening bilateral relations between the EU and Brazil, which has in recent years gained considerable prominence on the international stage. This EESC opinion also analyses issues relating to the environment, social cohesion and the role of multinational and European companies in Brazil, as well as education, poverty, climate change and bio fuels, amongst others. All of these issues will be discussed once the round table is up and running.

It is worth noting that the next EU-Brazil Summit will take place in Rio de Janeiro in December 2008.


Combating fraud and counterfeiting of means of payment

The EU needs to improve its strategy for combating fraud and the counterfeiting of means of payment by deploying a range of measures. In doing so, it must involve not only the authorities but also consumer associations, with a view to alerting users to the potential risks of using non-cash means of payment.

The Committee regrets that the steps taken so far to crack down on fraud and counterfeiting have proved insufficient to halt the spread of the problem. Closer cooperation is needed between the relevant national authorities in order to ensure more effective preventative action.

Recommended measures include harmonising national legislation to provide more effective deterrence, ensuring that each national authority creates a digital database containing information on levels of fraud risk, and tasking Europol with monitoring the drive to prevent and counter fraud.

A new framework for services of general interest and globalisation

Economic globalisation is shaping a new landscape in which the decisions taken by a number of international bodies such as the WTO, for example, could jeopardise the very survival of services of general interest. The EESC has drawn up an own-initiative opinion on this subject, calling on the other Community institutions to prepare an in-depth debate on the need to establish policy guidelines for services of general interest and the effects of globalisation. The Committee emphasises that it is crucial to establish policy guidelines that help maintain the current legal framework in this area.

In fact, services of general interest play such a major role in the daily lives of Europe’s citizens that their contribution to social, economic and territorial cohesion and to the EU’s sustainable development forms an integral part of the European social model. It is worth bearing in mind that the purpose of social services of general interest is to address all social disadvantages that are likely to threaten people’s physical or moral integrity, in particular sickness, old age, inability to work, lack of job security, social exclusion, etc.
No Solidarity, no Wealth

Born out of the European Citizens Forum which took place last June in Wroclaw, in Poland, the Seminar on ‘Europe of Solidarity: challenge for tomorrow’ organised by the European Economic and Social Committee on 29 October 2008 emphasized and proposed the key word ‘solidarity’ as a solution, to tackle today’s financial and social crisis.

Part of the slogan of the new President of the EESC, Mr Mario Sepi, the word ‘solidarity’ was gifted with a deeper social meaning in the context of that seminar. Mrs Leila Kurki, new President of the Section for Social Affairs, Employment and Citizenship of the EESC strongly insisted that: ‘A social policy which encourages solidarity is not a luxury’.

The participants of the seminar sent the message that solidarity does not automatically flow from economic growth and at the same time it requires commitment and action. Participants underlined that nowadays society cannot develop without human values and without solidarity. The current crisis puts it more in evidence now than ever. The first place where these values can be learnt and developed is the family. Families are the key for development of mutually supportive and socially balanced societies.

Today’s economic crisis and social difficulties show that public authorities should adopt specific policies in favour of the family and especially the poor ones who constitute the first victims of the world economic crisis.

IN SHORT

Hearing on socially innovative solutions to transport and energy challenges

The hearing organised on 26 September 2008 at the General Council of Côtes d’Armor (St Brieuc, France) in the framework of the EESC study group on ‘The social implications of transport and energy developments’ (rapporteur Mrs Batut) provided a platform for exchanging the views of the various components of organised civil society from the Brittany region active in the field of transport and energy. The participants emphasised that structural developments played a key role in the evolution of fuel and commodity (e.g. fish, road transport services) prices, that recent transport and energy price hikes did represent a risk for social cohesion, and that this risk could be contained through political innovation and will to review obsolete practices. Mr Mattia Pellegrini, member of the private office of the Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for transport policy, underlined the key role played by the EESC in fostering debate on this issue at European level, and welcomed the socially innovative approaches developed by the General Council of Côtes d’Armor, which he believed should serve as examples for other regions in Europe.

A more effective communication through new communication products

Strengthening the communication is one of the main priorities of the new EESC Presidency. The Committee has therefore developed a new range of communication products: ‘The EESC in 10 points’, a leaflet that describes in a clear and synthetic manner the role, organisation, aims and priorities of the EESC; ‘The EESC in motion’ (available at: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/media/AV/index_en.asp), a web page on the EESC website that explains what the EESC is and what it does, through video-clips regarding several main events and activities of the Committee. The EESC is also preparing a booklet to be published in January 2009, whose aim is to present and describe the Committee’s priorities during the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the 1st semester of 2009.

All these products and many more are part of the EESC’s new communication strategy.

Europa Diary brings Europe to schools

Former EESC President Dimitris Dimitriadis welcomed representatives of the European Commission’s DG SANCO and the organisation Generation Europe for a signing ceremony of the Europa Diary project on 21 October.

The Europa Diary is a practical and up-to-date agenda with EU information for pupils aged 15-18 years old, to be distributed in schools. The EESC will become the second institution, after the European Commission, to finance and participate in the project. The content dedicated to the EESC will inform young European citizens on the importance of being involved in European civil society.

An initiative of the DG SANCO, the diary is coordinated by Generation Europe and was created with the goal to inform young Europeans about their consumer rights. It soon became a learning tool used by teachers and students in class, with information on all aspects of the European Union, covering areas such as the EU institutions, environmental responsibility, education and career planning.

The diary is printed in 22 languages and distributed free of charge to over 18 000 schools in all 27 European Union countries. The EESC will participate in the 2009-2010 school year edition. The Director of Consumer Affairs in DG SANCO, Ms Jacqueline Minor, the President of Generation Europe Foundation, Ms Catie Thorburn, and DG SANCO’s administrator Ginette Nabavi, were present at the ceremony.