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The **EESC** priorities during the **Dutch** presidency

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European Economic and Social Committee



A word from the president

I have every reason to hope that the Netherlands will lean on its experience of European integration and do everything in its power to:

- base the Council agenda on matters that are truly essential for the Member States, in the short and long term;
- work to enable the Council to present itself as a body that stands for dialogue and consensus, and that can work in solidarity to arrive at robust solutions and apply them quickly, decisively and courageously;
- bring Europe closer to its people, by showing them a Europe that cares for them in a practical way.

At the time of writing, the Dutch Presidency programme has yet to be unveiled. The Dutch government has, however, set out its intentions in letters to the House of Representatives. I was very interested to note that in writing these letters, the Dutch government is not only informing and consulting its parliamentarians, but it is also making a point of doing so, from the outset, in response to the opinion already issued by the national Economic and Social Council on the Dutch presidency priorities. This is excellent practice and I hope that the Dutch presidency will do the same at European level: working closely with the Parliament and using every opportunity to demonstrate that the Council has given consideration to the opinions of the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, in the hope, of course, that it will have followed as many of their recommendations as possible.

In essence, the Committee's priorities during this presidency will be those already set by its bodies or to be set in the coming months: these will be dictated by the interests of European civil society and the situation in the EU. Having said that, the EU will inevitably be confronted by specific challenges during the period covered by the Dutch presidency, not least the need to act decisively to address the current influx of refugees into Europe, and it goes without saying that the Committee is ready to make a contribution against this backdrop.

Moreover, there are many points of convergence with the key principles highlighted by the Dutch government for its presidency.

The Dutch government is right to start by calling for „a Union that focuses on the essential, a Union that brings added value for European people and business“. I am delighted to see it stated that the fundamental task here is to secure job creation and economic growth, and I am even happier to see it state that this first point was the request of the national Economic and Social Council.

The Dutch government is also right in wanting to see a *Unie die verbindt* which could be translated as a „unifying Union“, and in speaking of fundamental values and the need for public support. Still more pleasing to me is the mention of the need for „active involvement of the population and civil society organisations, so that they know that their voices are heard“. That is precisely what is needed if we are to get Europe back on its feet and back to serving its true values, restore the support and enthusiasm of the people and stop portraying it as a remote and insensitive machine that is incapable of consensus except when announcing bad news. We need to state clearly that Europe is listening to civil society, and stress that bodies to represent civil society properly are in place, we need to prove that civil society's voice is heard and we need to give tangible evidence of courage, creativity, solidarity and investment; all that with the

aim of combatting poverty and improving living and working conditions for all.

If the Dutch presidency makes that its aim and chairs the Council in that spirit, if it can take pride in having listened to civil society organisations, then not only will our Committee naturally be ready to respond rapidly to any request for an opinion, but the presidency will have no stronger ally. And the Committee will be sure to acknowledge all the presidency has done for the real European Union, that is for its businesses, its workers and its people.

Georges Dassis
President of the EESC



Sustainable growth and employment key priorities for Dutch Social and Economic Council

Since the 1950s, the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) has published several advisory reports on European Integration. In an advisory letter on the priorities of the Dutch presidency to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2014, the SER underlined the importance of European integration and cooperation. The SER cooperates with the EESC in several ways. Not only is the SER actively involved in the Europe 2020 Strategy Steering Committee, it is also a member of the Network of national Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) of the EU and the EESC, CESlink (the online community of ESCs in the EU) and the International Association of ESCs and Similar Institutions.

The SER advises the Dutch government and parliament and aims to foster social consensus on national and international socio-economic issues. It is composed of employers' representatives, trade union representatives and independent experts. The SER's advice is guided by the objective of social prosperity in its widest sense, encompassing both material and social progress and a high-quality environment to live in. The SER's reports ideally have a dual role: to help shape cabinet policy to ensure broad support from civil society and to help ensure that the business sector operates in a socially responsible manner. Committed to detecting and interpreting signals from society, the SER offers various civil society organisations the opportunity to contribute specific expertise.

The main priority for the Dutch presidency is to restore sustainable growth and employment by means of various sub-priorities such as the Europe 2020 strategy and the Investment Plan for Europe, the promotion of the internal market, consumers and the environment, a fully operational well-connected internal energy market, investment in infrastructure and knowledge, harnessing the potential of the circular economy, open coordination methods to stimulate life-long learning, and promoting genuine mobility for workers within the EU.

According to the SER, labour mobility can help to reduce unemployment, by putting the right people in the right places to find work. In order to boost support for the free movement of workers, services and secondments there must be a level playing field. That is why in its opinion on labour mobility, the SER calls for an action plan, drawn up in consultation with both sides of industry, for the promotion of genuine labour mobility within the EU. The Dutch presidency is making a significant contribution to the achievement of genuine labour mobility.

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The priorities of European civil society during the Dutch presidency



With poverty and social exclusion still on the rise, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) intends to continue to focus on the **European social model**, placing special emphasis on social investment as a productive factor and on efficient and reliable social benefit systems, contributing to the construction of a European pillar of social rights. Job-creation is a top priority and the EESC will focus on innovative policies with a human dimension that strike the right balance between economic, social and environmental concerns. Special attention will be paid to measures that increase employment, especially for youth, migrants, refugees and long-term unemployed.

The EESC will also promote **decent work**, highlighting the need for decent working conditions in particular in the context of the free movement of workers and services. Research and innovation are essential to **improve competitiveness, promote growth, create jobs and address societal challenges**. The Committee will look at the impact of the digital transition and the transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient and green economy on employment. Recognising the changing nature of industry, the EESC will closely monitor and analyse the developments related to **Industry 4.0**, which is

about new business-models, a changing mindset and the interaction between existing production lines and disruptive technologies, so as to develop a holistic approach to the best methods to prepare companies in Europe to take part in the process.

The Committee will support a more open and humanist **common immigration and asylum policy** and greater solidarity and shared responsibility in the European Union. It will work to ensure better recognition of the contribution that migrants make to Europe's economy and society, promote their **integration into the labour market**, improve their training and guarantee full respect of their fundamental rights.

Migration, as well as youth employment and a more integrated civil society in the Southern countries, will also be a key topic in the activities related to **Euromed and African countries**. Regarding the Eastern Neighbours, the involvement of civil society in the monitoring of the implementation of Association Agreements will be the main priority. Two Civil Society Platforms, with Moldova and Georgia, and a Domestic Advisory Group for Ukraine will be established.

The Committee will follow-up on the **EU trade negotiations** and the civil society monitoring of EU agreements. Special attention will be paid to the DCFTA agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, as well as to the negotiations

with the **USA and Japan**. The issue of global supply chains and sustainable development in trade agreements will be addressed through an opinion, also as a contribution to the ILO annual Conference in June 2016.

The Dutch presidency will be associated with the work of the EESC in two areas: **enlargement**, more specifically the initial steps of the recently set up **EU-Serbia civil society Joint Consultative Committee**, and **Latin America**, where the presidency will be associated with the contribution of the **EU-Brazil Civil Society Round Table** at the 2016 EU-Brazil Summit.

The EESC will closely follow the **coordination of social security systems** as part of the development policy, the **revision of the Cotonou Agreement** after 2020 and the follow-up of the **post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs). Involving civil society is of particular importance when it comes to the concrete implementation phase of the **UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development**. The EESC will work to set up a European Sustainable Development Forum which should provide a structured and independent framework for civil society involvement in the implementation, monitoring and review of the SDGs at EU level.

In the area of **climate policy**, the Committee will propose concrete means for promoting civil society involvement in the preparation and implementation of international agreements.

Other issues will concern mainstreaming climate considerations in all EU policies, the transition to low emission climate resilient economies and adaptation (with particular focus on the land use sector, including links with food security).

The EESC will actively promote the implementation of **macro-regional strategies** and programmes for the 2014-2020 period, ensuring full involvement of civil society organisations in the process. It will also remain focused on the creation of a **common European urban development practice** which contributes to the stimulation of economic growth in a sustainable manner. The EESC will aim to ensure that the urbanisation process in Europe goes hand in hand with increased attractiveness of rural areas, focusing on **growth and jobs in rural and remote areas**, especially for young people.

The EESC will continue to support sustainable agriculture and fisheries. It will promote the main recommendations of its exploratory opinion on a **simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy**. The Committee has been increasingly concerned about the environmental and social impacts of food production and consumption in the context of **global food security**. It intends to tackle the issue of sustainable food systems in a holistic manner, e.g. by promoting sustainable agricultural production



while ensuring «the right to food», reducing food waste and enhancing sustainable consumption.

The Committee will continue its critical assessment of the implementation of the **Europe 2020 Strategy**, in close cooperation with the network of national Economic and Social Councils and other stakeholders. It considers the mid-term review of the strategy to be a unique opportunity to inject the burst of new energy it needs to get back on the right track.

The work in the area of **Social Enterprise and Social Economy** will continue. In response to the request from civil society, the EESC will continue to monitor and evaluate political developments at EU and Member State level. It identifies concrete measures to improve the general environment of social economy enterprises, disseminates best practices in the Member States and raises the profile of the sector.

New consumption forms such as **collaborative consumption and the sharing economy** will be on the EESC's agenda. The annual European Consumer Day will concentrate on the consequences of the Better Regulation Package. The Committee will launch a study on how better

information on the **life expectancy of products** could influence consumer behaviour, enabling manufacturers to adapt their production to consumer demands. The EESC will draw up an opinion on the new EC proposal on **circular economy**, assessing the contribution of circular economy to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

The EESC will continue to participate actively in the on-going debate on **better economic, social, political and institutional governance in the euro area** by ensuring that the positions of civil society stakeholders are duly taken into account. The EESC will focus on the specific follow-up initiatives to the Five Presidents' Report on Completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), such as a European Deposit Insurance Scheme. In particular, the Committee will present its views on the main topics of the Deepening EMU Package.

The EESC will be working on the first and most urgent steps of the **Action Plan on building a Capital Markets Union** (CMU), such as re-launching sound securitisation markets and changes to the Prospectus Directive, in order to make it easier and less expensive for small and medium-sized companies to raise capital.

The Committee is committed to **combatting fraud and tax evasion**. It will work on the issues of tax base erosion and profit shifting, as

well as the proposals for a Consolidated Corporate Tax Base, in order to develop a transparent and fairer business landscape.

In the information society domain, the EESC will contribute to the implementation of the **Digital Single Market** strategy with opinions on key issues such as geo-blocking and the review of the telecom regulatory framework. Particular focus will be on maximizing the opportunities offered by unhindered access to digital goods and services for both businesses and citizens. **E-skills, e-inclusion, privacy and personal data protection** will continue to be at the heart of the Committee's concerns.

The EESC will build on its previous opinions on the **European Energy Union** to engage with more specific legislative proposals. The Committee will stress the need to empower energy consumers to become active market participants and ensure that citizens and organized civil society have a strong voice with regard to their «energy future». The idea of a **European Energy Dialogue** (EED) will be further promoted as a parallel process running alongside the Energy Union. The EED will provide an independent framework for civil society dialogue, linked to national energy plans.

The Committee will also continue its work on promoting the creation of a **single European transport area**, in particular focusing on promoting a truly European aviation strategy that

will improve the competitiveness of the aviation value chain so that this sector continues to be a key driver of economic growth. The EESC will emphasise topical matters such as inland waterways, self-driving cars, big data and the societal impacts and regulation of sharing economy activities in the transport domain.

Communicating Europe in partnership remains a high priority of the EESC. During the Dutch presidency the Committee will, among other things, continue to engage in a dialogue with young Europeans during its event "Your Europe, Your Say!". A particular emphasis will be put on "Going Local" activities that engage EESC members in a dialogue "back home" and in Brussels.

A Union that focuses on the essentials, jobs, growth and connection during the Dutch presidency of the Council of the European Union



The 12th Dutch presidency comes at a time when Europe is cautiously emerging from years of economic crisis. Yet challenges remain: unemployment is still too high and a growing number of people are living in poverty. An ageing population will place a greater burden on the shrinking percentage of workers. The flow of refugees is also testing the resilience of the welfare. In the meantime, the global economy is changing rapidly. In the digital age, Member States have to adapt to remain competitive, improve their potential for growth and safeguard their welfare systems. Scarce resources, energy costs and the impact of climate change are all major challenges.

In our policy and decision making, not least on European integration, the Dutch Social and Economic Council (SER) has been playing an important advisory role for over six decades. It ensures the involvement of civil society organisations in decision-making, which also makes the EESC a natural partner on social and economic challenges in Europe.

During its presidency, the Netherlands is advocating a Union that focuses on the essentials, creates growth and jobs through innovation, seeks

engagement in European societies and connects with citizens.

A Union that focuses on the essentials is one that aims to add value to what Member States can and must do themselves. The Dutch presidency aims to make lasting improvements to the quality of legislation, making it simpler and more workable and, where possible and necessary, reducing the administrative burden and costs. Above all, it is aiming for higher-quality, future-proof legislation. This is important for citizens, companies and public authorities, and will promote sustainable economic growth and competitiveness.

An innovative Union that focuses on growth and jobs is one that enhances its economic and foreign policy clout, and fosters Europe's global competitiveness. Innovation must top the EU agenda if the Union wishes to remain an economic powerhouse in a rapidly changing world. Innovation is the key to sustainable and inclusive growth, improvement and renewal. It is the best response to the pressure exerted by globalisation. Job creation is the top priority. Europe's social identity should also be an integral part of the strategic agenda, however: it is meant to benefit people. This means that decent work should be promoted and social dumping should have no place in the EU. Equal pay for the same work in

the same workplace should be the leading principle, including for mobile workers in the EU. Decent work also means better protection for workers against carcinogens in the workplace. We are well aware, as the EESC has stated, that the poverty target of the Europe 2020 strategy will not be met. The Dutch Presidency will stimulate the exchange of knowledge and best practices in the fight against poverty, encouraging an integrated approach.

The Dutch presidency is therefore advocating a Union that connects: a Union that is based on fundamental values and is supported by its citizens. Support for European decision-making can be generated by offering visible opportunities for public input and influence. Strengthening democratic legitimacy will be a key aim of our presidency. This will require active involvement from people and civil society organisations. Transparency in decision-making will therefore be indispensable. Support for the EU will also be strengthened if the Union actually achieves results for citizens and companies in areas that are important to them. The Dutch government will therefore be working towards this end.

We will use the Dutch presidency to help the Union achieve concrete improvements for European citizens and companies. Involving all relevant

stakeholders at the European, national and regional levels, especially through the EESC as the EU-socio-economic institutional platform, will be vital if we are to build confidence and equip European societies for the future.



Lodewijk Asscher
*Deputy Prime Minister,
Minister of Social Affairs
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Some basic facts about the Netherlands



Official name	Kingdom of the Netherlands
Capital	Amsterdam
Area	41 543 km ²
Other main towns (in terms of population)	Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht
National language	Dutch
Official language	Dutch
Currency	Euro
Population (1/9/2015)¹	16 957 605
Foreign population (1/8/2014)¹	1 997 584
GDP in current prices (in millions of euro, 2014)¹	662 770
GDP per capita (in Purchasing Power Standards [PPS], EU-28 = 100, 2014)²	130
Domestic employment (2014)²	8 739 000
Employment rate (persons aged 20-64 years, 2014)²	73.1%
Unemployment rate (as defined by the ILO, 2014)²	7.4%
Life expectancy at birth (2014)¹	Women: 83.29 years / Men: 79.87 years
Main exports (% of total exports, 2014)³	Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products, etc. (16.73%) Machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers, etc. (13.61%) Electrical, electronic equipment (8.47%)
Main imports (% of total imports, 2014)³	Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products, etc. (21.17%) Machinery nuclear reactors, boilers, etc. (12.88%) Electrical, electronic equipment (10.21%)

¹ Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek

² Eurostat

³ Trademap





Notes

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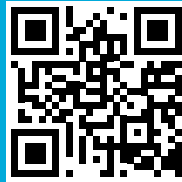


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