



## REX newsletter | The EESC in the world

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Dear Reader,

After the elections to the European Parliament, the EU must now prepare for the future. On the one hand, the results in favour of the pro-EU majority should allow us to **continue and reinforce crucial policies** such as better living standards for our citizens, Europe's energy sovereignty and strategic autonomy, the Green Deal, the digital transition, strong support for the independence of Ukraine and the consolidation and integration of our defence and security sector, a clear European approach in defending multilateralism and a rules-based world order as well as the enlargement policy and the necessary institutional reforms that go with it.

On the other hand, **nothing can be taken for granted**. The European elections of June 2024 saw a surge of extremist forces with a clear anti-European agenda in different countries including France and Germany, the two pillars of the European construction. Thus, these elections can also be taken as a warning signal that many citizens feel very removed from the Brussels bubble. While that very anti-European agenda has just been defeated in France, it is clear that we all have a period ahead of us in which a **reconstruction of trust** will be needed.

In order to achieve this, it is crucial for the system made by traditional political families that support shared values to **deliver and tackle the new challenges** of our time: how to strengthen democracy and participation in a world where authoritarianism is on the rise, how to ensure price stability and secure supply of energy and strategic raw materials to the economy in a volatile international context, how to put citizens' interests and rights at the forefront while industrial and technological progress, including the emergence of Artificial Intelligence, is changing all future perspectives.

Recently, there have been elections in the United Kingdom, a country that decided to leave the EU after long years of anti-European propaganda campaigns led by populists. Despite all the **advantages of being in the European Union**, in 2016 the damage was done, and now polls show that as many as 55% of Britons regret that decision. There is a lesson in this story: the EU should never again allow

populist forces, often supported by foreign information manipulation and interference, to impose an agenda leading to disruption of good governance and to widespread discord in our societies.

The rise of the extreme right certainly stems from failures to deliver that must be corrected, but it is also promoted by a curtain of lies and fake news on the real situation of Europe which, despite problems and shocks, remains the **best place to live in the world**, with its democratic institutions, its universalistic welfare systems, its social market model and participation of civil society in decision-making. So many people living in other continents can only dream of all this, and yet we easily forget it and allow ourselves to be deceived by defeatist narratives that do not mirror the reality of facts.

In December 2023, the Commission proposed a **Defence of Democracy Package** to which our Committee submitted a certain number of **critical remarks** during the plenary of April this year. For the EESC, it is crucial to **include civil society, social partners and all legitimate interest representations** in the process of defending European democracy. This is what our section is doing, along with organising a series of **conferences against disinformation** in different countries. In this issue of our newsletter, you will find a report on the successful event held in Moldova in April. We will continue the series with another conference and awareness-raising campaign soon.

I am convinced that **participatory democracy** has a strong role to play, and we will do our part.

Yours sincerely,  
**Dimitris Dimitriadis**  
REX Section President



## Eastern Neighbours

### The EESC on the prosecution of a Belarusian opposition activist



**Andrei Gnyot** (Андрей Гнёт) is a **Belarusian** journalist, activist and human rights defender who was detained in **Serbia** last October following an extradition request from Belarus on the basis of an alleged violation of Belarus's tax laws. The first court hearing on his extradition in December 2023 was held with procedural violations, and the judge's decision to approve his forcible return to Belarus was annulled in February 2024 by the court of appeal. The retrial in May 2024 resulted in a decision to extradite him, which he is currently appealing. The final hearing is imminent.

Andrei Gnyot participated in the **2020 protests** demanding President Lukashenko's resignation; he also collaborated with independent news outlets like Radio Svaboda. He could face severe penalties in

Belarus, including up to seven years for tax evasion and potentially ten more years for alleged involvement in an extremist group (his Free Association of Athletes SOS-BY, was designated 'extremist' by the Belarusian authorities).

In response to this worrying situation, the presidency of the EESC's **Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law Group** (FRRL) made a [statement](#) expressing the fear that the extradition could lead to an unfair trial and inhumane treatment, as Gnyot's political involvement in the 2020 protests suggests his prosecution is politically motivated. The FRRL presidency emphasises Serbia's international obligations to uphold human rights, including prohibiting torture and ensuring fair trials. The FRRL urges Serbia to prevent Gnyot's extradition, considering the serious human rights abuses in Belarus, including mistreatment of detainees and suppression of opposition voices, as documented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur. [More info](#).

### The EESC joins forces with Moldova



On 16-19 April, the EESC went to the **Republic of Moldova** for a series of initiatives in this country, which is now a candidate for EU accession. The series was opened by a meeting of the [EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform](#) (CSP), a bilateral consultative body established by the EU-Moldova Association Agreement (AA) of 2014: the CSP members discussed the progress Moldova has made in the implementation of the AA and of the commitments

taken in view of accession, such as those concerning reform of the justice sector, fighting corruption, de-oligarchisation and consumer protection. They also adopted a [Joint Declaration](#).

The second day saw a meeting, organised by the EESC's [Ad hoc group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law](#) (FRRL), with different stakeholders to discuss the situation in Moldova. It was the **first such visit to a candidate country** made by the group, which had previously been focusing on EU Member States. In the evening, EESC President **Oliver Röpke** met with Moldovan civil society actors in a **town hall meeting** that gave rise to very interesting discussions on the expectations regarding EU membership and the steps made by public authorities and civil society to prepare for that goal.

During his stay in Moldova, Mr Röpke also met Prime Minister **Dorin Recean**, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration of Moldova **Cristina Gherasimov**, Minister for Internal Affairs **Adrian Efras** and Minister of Infrastructure and Regional Development **Andrei Spînu**. He opened, together with Ms Gherasimov, the high-level conference [Citizens can defeat disinformation. Civil society for an open democratic debate](#), the second in a series of events organised by the EESC to involve civil society and citizens in the fight against foreign information manipulation and interference. The conference took place at **Moldova State University** and was well attended by communication professionals (such as debunkers, journalists, influencers and cybersecurity experts), as well as civil society organisations and students, with national television [reporting on the event](#). An **awareness-raising campaign**, led by the EESC, the university and several participants in the conference, highlighted the topic for one week, providing information [in three languages](#). Since disinformation in Moldova tries to exploit the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the country, the topic of **empowering minorities and peripheral regions** in the enlargement process was prominent on the agenda of the conference.

Along the same line, President Röpke concluded the EESC events with a **field visit to Gagauzia**, a southern part of Moldova which lags behind the rest of the country when it comes to economic and

social indicators, trust in the national authorities and support for the European process. In what was **the first time** locals could see the president of a European institution in person, Mr Röpke met with a variety of Gagauz civil society actors and journalists in order to listen to local concerns and illustrate how the Structural Funds and other EU tools can help develop the country in a way that leaves no one behind. [Read more.](#)



### European Economic Area

#### EEA: stock-taking in Iceland



The **European Economic Area Consultative Committee** held its 33rd meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, on 23-24 May. To mark the entry into force of the EEA Agreement in 1994, the EEA CC debated and adopted a [resolution and report](#) on 30 years of cooperation under the EEA Agreement. In addition, the meeting included a discussion on the fight against disinformation in the context of the European elections as well as the presentation of a European Commission report that compares

decisions taken by the EU Court of Justice and the EFTA Court in the field of social security. The main highlight of the meeting was the participation of Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, Iceland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, who spoke about how to best safeguard the EEA's economic security and competitiveness in times of global challenges and geopolitical shifts. On 13 June, at the invitation of the Belgian EU Presidency, the EEA CC co-chair of the EU side, István Komoróczy, participated in the **Council's EFTA Working Party meeting**, where he presented the main content and results of the recent EEA CC meeting.

## Western Balkans

### Western Balkans: a high-level conference in Ljubljana



On 24 May, the EESC held a **civil society high-level conference** in Ljubljana, meeting with civil society representatives from the Western Balkans and officials from Slovenia. Celebrating 20 years since the EU’s biggest enlargement and Slovenia’s EU membership, the event facilitated discussions on necessary reforms in both the Western Balkans and the EU to sustain the enlargement policy’s success. It also addressed the current state of civil

society in the region and the importance of its inclusion in the accession process. Participants adopted [conclusions](#) directed at national and European authorities.

In the conclusions, they welcomed the New Growth Plan and the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans (RGFWB), advocating a gradual, merit-based approach to EU accession. They emphasised the need for increased funding, technical assistance, conditionality tied to democratic, rule of law and human rights reforms and simplified work permit procedures. The importance of regional cooperation and resolving political disputes was also highlighted.

Speaking at the conference, **EESC President Oliver Röpk**e stressed the EESC’s continuous support for the gradual integration of the Western Balkan region in the European Union, announcing the Civil Society Enlargement Forum in Brussels on 24 October. [More info](#).

### Montenegro advances towards EU membership



On 16 April, the **EU-Montenegro Joint Consultative Committee (JCC)** held its 18th meeting in Podgorica to discuss Montenegro’s progress on the path to EU accession. Besides the state of civic and social dialogue, matters such as the rule of law, the green agenda and sustainable connectivity were discussed with extensive representation of organised civil society from the country. In the [joint declaration](#) from the meeting, JCC members emphasised the importance of reforms in the

judiciary, media laws and public administration, and stressed the need for political unity and inclusiveness. The JCC also highlighted the need for stronger cooperation with civil society and urged the Montenegrin government to address corruption, environmental issues and social dialogue effectively. The next meeting will be held in Brussels on 27 November 2024.

Moreover, on 13 June, Decebal-Ștefăniță Padure and Gordana Đurović, co-chairs of the JCC, made a [joint statement](#) emphasising that Montenegro is on the right track towards EU membership, but its progress should go hand-in-hand with its organised civil society. They praised recent government actions to meet rule of law benchmarks but stressed the need for genuine involvement of civil society in policy-making and EU negotiations. They also called for amendments to the Law on Prevention of Corruption and highlighted the importance of establishing a Council for Cooperation between Government and NGOs. The JCC sees civil society collaboration as a measure of democratic progress and essential for Montenegro’s ambition of becoming the 28th EU Member State by 2028.

## Where we are with Serbia



The **EU-Serbia Joint Consultative Committee (JCC)** held its 17th meeting on 5 April in Brussels. Serbian and EU JCC members engaged in vibrant discussions with representatives of the Serbian and EU authorities and civil society on crucial issues for Serbia's path towards accession. [EU-Serbia JCC meeting -video.](#)

They discussed the state of play, the opportunities offered by the **New Growth Plan** and the **Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans**, the state of democracy and rule of law, as well as elections in Serbia. In its [final declaration](#), the JCC:

- looks forward to the swift opening of cluster 3 on *Competitiveness and inclusive growth* and calls on the Serbian authorities to make progress with reforms;
- emphasises the importance of maintaining EU integration as a strategic objective and of stepping up communication on the benefits associated with EU membership;
- calls on the Serbian authorities to clarify Serbia's foreign policy stances;
- welcomes the New Growth Plan and the accompanying Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans as a key catalyst for economic growth and convergence with the EU and emphasises the conditionality approach to fundamentals;
- expresses deep concern about reports of election irregularities and proposes specific measures, including the full implementation of the ODIHR (the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) recommendations;
- regrets the backsliding of democracy in Serbia and provides a number of concrete examples and recommendations.

The next EU-Serbia JCC meeting will take place by the end of the year in Belgrade.

## Southern Neighbours

### Euromed Summit in Malta

The 28th **Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions** was held in Malta on 18-19 June 2024.

This year, the summit was dedicated to the main theme of 'youth involvement in social and civil dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region', providing valuable input to the opinion [REX/583](#) dedicated to the same topic. 10 youth representatives financed by the Anna Lindh Foundation and by the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) took part in the summit debates. They also participated in the pre-summit **youth forum**, where they could interact with EESC members. On this occasion, they underlined the strong interest young people have in participating in social and civil dialogue as long as their full involvement in decision-making processes is guaranteed.

In addition to the main theme, summit participants also discussed the issues 'climate change and water politics' (linked to [REX/585](#) – *Water Politics: Empowering Youth, Women, and Indigenous and Local Communities*) as well as 'migration and skills'. The Euromed Summit was co-organised by the EESC, the European Commission (DG NEAR), the Union for the Mediterranean, the Anna Lindh Foundation and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ).



## Africa, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP)

### 20th anniversary commemorations of the African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (AU ECOSOCC) in Ghana



An EESC Delegation took part in the **20th anniversary commemorations of the African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council** as well as in the **Citizens' Forum on democracy and institutional resilience** held in Accra on 17-19 July 2024.

On this occasion, EESC President Oliver Röpke and AU ECOSOCC Presiding Officer Khalid Boudali signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** between the two institutions, opening a new chapter in their cooperation in the context of the **AU-EU partnership**. The memorandum strengthens cooperation between the EU and African Union civil societies on promoting economic and social development, enhancing civil society engagement, and fostering sustainable development, reaffirming the African Union's strategic partnership with the EU and promoting renewed democratic dialogue.

At the Gala event, attended by a number of high-level leaders, the EESC President stressed the parallel roles of the EESC and AU ECOSOCC in bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers, by ensuring that the aspirations of citizens are reflected in the policy-making processes. During the event, the EESC was also honoured with a token of appreciation from the African Union ECOSOCC, celebrating the strengthened partnership.

During the opening and closing sessions of the **Citizens' Forum**, President Röpke highlighted the pressing challenges that democracies in both Africa and Europe face, as well as the EESC's approach to fundamental rights and the rule of law, engaging employers and workers to address issues such as fair justice and anti-corruption efforts. The President further stressed the importance of defending democracy globally and supporting resilient civil societies.

The various sessions and exhibitions of the two days provided opportunities for engagement and networking with civil society representatives from across the African continent and, as a result, valuable input was gathered for opinion [REX/584 - Democracy in Africa – current situation and future perspectives. What role for the EESC?](#)



## Study Visit to Uganda



In 2023, the EESC launched a campaign in favour of an **EU Blue Deal** to increase water-related security, resilience, and sustainability both in the EU and globally.

Against this background, REX is working on own-initiative opinion ([REX/585](#)) on *Water Politics: Empowering Youth, Women and Indigenous and Local Communities*, aimed at helping the EU to make evidence-based decisions on water, both on European territory and in the EU's cooperation with third countries. An important moment in the drawing-up of this opinion was the study visit to Uganda on 22-23 July, where the question of **water supply, water scarcity, and the impact of water on the whole society and economy** is particularly evident.

EESC Members met in Kampala with relevant local civil society actors in this field, as well as international actors operating in the country, with the goal of raising awareness on the needs of young people in Uganda, particularly under the angle of their **right to water, education and economic and social development**, all of which seems to be interlinked.



## Civil society organisations in Africa: a study



The REX Section commissioned a **study** on the [Involvement of Civil Society in the Economic Partnership Agreement \(EPA\) between the European Union \(EU\) and the Southern African Development Community \(SADC\) EPA States](#).

The study assesses the state of play and presents initial recommendations for regional dialogue and national technical assistance to help build trust and create the necessary conditions for better **African CSO engagement** with the EU on the topic of trade and sustainable development. In particular, the conclusions highlight:

- a significant ‘trust deficit’ regarding the inclusion of CSOs in trade agreements, since the authorities are worried they could be compelled to adopt EU social and environmental standards that could

lead to new non-tariff barriers;

- a lack of trust in local CSOs’ capacity for meaningful participation in trade policy dialogue;
- a lack of capacity and resources among CSOs to define agendas, although there is a growing interest in the EU initiatives on sustainability (beyond the EPA).

Overall, the study calls for continued efforts to build CSO capacity, increase trust and foster a more comprehensive and inclusive **dialogue on trade and sustainability** issues.

## East Asia

### EU-Japan DAG meetings in Tokyo

This year marks the 5th anniversary of the **EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)**, which is the legal basis for the institution of an **EU Domestic Advisory Group (DAG)** tasked with monitoring the trade and sustainable development chapter of the agreement. In April, the DAG sent nine members to Tokyo, including three members of the EESC (Krzysztof Pater, Erika Koller and Georgi Stoev).

The delegation participated in a **joint dialogue** with civil society organised by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with discussions on greenwashing, circular economy, labour standards, corporate social responsibility and the new EU legislation on forced labour. The ratification of fundamental **ILO conventions** remains high on the agenda. As there is no DAG on the Japanese side, the European delegation seized the opportunity to highlight the role of DAGs in monitoring the agreements between the EU and third countries.

While in Tokyo, the EU DAG held a **workshop on human rights and environmental due diligence**, aimed at deepening the dialogue between EU and Japanese civil society representatives, this time in the context of the upcoming Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (‘CS-triple-D’). Participation was good and the Japan Business Council in Europe and the European Business Council in Japan were very helpful with the organisation of the meeting.



## Latin America

### Bem-vindo de volta, Brasil!

On 8-10 April, the EESC went on an official visit to Brazil. Our eight-member delegation, led by our President **Oliver Röpke**, visited Brasília after the country took a new course, reinforcing its democratic institutions. Brazil has re-established a body for civil society consultation, the **Sustainable Economic and Social Development Council of Brazil (CDESS)**, and come back to the international stage, not least through the recent Brazilian presidency of Mercosur and the organisation of COP30 in Brazil.

European civil society is very interested in reinforcing its international outreach to promote multilateralism, a rules-based order and a just transition to a greener and digital economy. The main objective of the mission was therefore to reconnect with Brazilian civil society and discuss future cooperation. During the visit, President Röpke and Minister Alexandre Padilha signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) which laid ground for stepping up our collaboration on crucial issues, such as environmental sustainability, economic development and social justice. The EESC and CDESS also published a [Joint Statement on EU-Brazil Civil Society Round Table](#).

The EESC delegation also met with other stakeholders, including President **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva**, Ministers Marina Silva and Luiz Marinho, as well as the President of the Supreme Federal Court, Carmen Lúcia, and members of the Brazilian Congress. Separate meetings were held with the Head of the EU Delegation in Brazil, the EU Member States' trade counsellors, as well as with the representatives of the FAO and the UN.



### Meeting civil society in Paraguay

Following the EESC mission to Brasília, a delegation of three members of our **Latin America Follow-up Committee** visited Asunción on 11-12 April. In a time of intense negotiations around the EU-Mercosur trade agreement under the Paraguayan presidency of the bloc, the EESC decided to liaise with Paraguayan authorities and civil society. The members of our delegation, **Carlos Silva**, **Josep Puxeu Rocamora** and **John Comer**, who are also the three rapporteurs of own-initiative opinion REX/586 on [\*Deforestation of the Amazon rainforest – impact on climate change and the global environment; consequences for companies, workers and population\*](#), reached out to the Paraguayan stakeholders to explore their views on the current global challenges, including sustainability, trade, investments, labour and skills. They met with representatives of the Ministry of Labour, foreign and economic affairs, as well as Paraguayan trade unions, business sector and civil society organisations working on environment and Indigenous communities.



### New perspectives with Chile

The 12th meeting of the **EU-Chile Joint Consultative Committee** took place in Brussels on 12-13 June. EESC members and Chilean delegates discussed the transition to a new framework of our bilateral

partnership under the **Advanced Framework Agreement**, which is expected to enter into force by the end of the year or in early 2025. They also debated the current challenges for democracy in the EU, Chile and across the globe. On economic issues, the state of play of bilateral trade and technology transfer dominated the discussions. Members also exchanged views on the participation of young people in civil dialogue and shared good practices concerning the inclusion of young people in the initiatives promoting sustainable development. Environmental issues were prominent on the agenda, including a healthy environment as a human right, climate financing and the future of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The JCC adopted a [Joint Declaration](#).



**Central America came to Brussels**

The EU **Domestic Advisory Group** and its counterparts from **six Central American countries** held their joint meeting in Brussels on 17-18 June. The seven DAGs took part in a workshop devoted to corporative sustainability due diligence and to the EU directive on deforestation. During the joint meeting, the DAGs discussed their role and functioning, in particular in view of the full application of the Association Agreement. The delegates exchanged good practices and debated the consequences of the full application of the AA for civil society in general, and for the work of the DAGs in particular. An important part of the discussion was dedicated to the space for democracy, as well as to the role of civil society and advisory groups in strengthening democracy and rights. The DAGs adopted a [Joint Declaration](#).



**North America**

**Building Bridges across the Atlantic: CETA DAGs give their input**

The special EU-Canada partnership was once again confirmed during the 6th **DAG-to-DAG meeting** of the EU and Canadian Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs), established under the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), and during the 2024 Canada-EU CETA Civil Society Forum, which took place in Ottawa on 18-19 March 2024.

The meetings were marked by constructive exchanges over two days, demonstrating that Canada and the EU share a **like-minded partnership** spanning from climate action and trade, to a common dedication to multilateralism and upholding the principles of rule of law, inclusivity, human rights and democracy. Employers, trade unions, business organisations, environmental groups, indigenous associations and other civil society organisations were able to engage with officials of the Government of Canada and of the European Commission on matters related to the implementation of CETA Chapter 22 (Trade and Sustainable Development), Chapter 23 (Trade and Labour) and Chapter 24 (Trade and Environment), as well as the CETA recommendations on Trade and Gender, SMEs and Trade, Climate Action and the **Paris Agreement**. Finally, the EU and Canada DAGs unanimously adopted a [Joint statement](#) with practical recommendations to make further progress on harnessing the full potential of CETA.



**UK**

**A new bridge unfolds between young Europeans on both sides of the Channel**



Recognising the disruption and changes brought about by the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, the opinion on **EU-UK Youth Engagement (REX/580)**, adopted at the EESC April plenary, points out that mobility restrictions have had the most significant impact on young people, including workers and professionals in the early stages of their careers, as well as students across different educational levels.

This document, which has been receiving wide and very positive media coverage from different media outlets, sets out initiatives aimed at promoting youth engagement, dynamic cooperation and structured dialogue. In this context, the EESC is urging the European Commission to propose and negotiate a **comprehensive and ambitious reciprocal youth**

**mobility partnership**, with the aim of establishing a clear framework for mobility in research, education, training and youth exchanges.

The opinion champions the development of a structured engagement between the EU, UK-level authorities and the UK devolved nations, with robust involvement of youth, including youth work and non-formal learning, to strengthen **youth civil society dialogue** and cooperation.

## Trade

### All-DAGs meeting: number four!



At its [4th edition](#), the All-DAGs meeting set the stage for a full advisory role of the Domestic Advisory Groups on trade and sustainable development: on 18 April, the members of all 12 EU DAGs met at the EESC for their annual plenary, together with institutional partners such as DG Trade and the European Parliament, as well as new entries such as the EU Council Presidency. The EU DAGs, comprised of members from European civil society organisations and the EESC, are set up under EU Free Trade Agreements. Alongside their partner country counterparts, they monitor and provide recommendations on the implementation of the **Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) Chapters** within

their respective agreements, with the UK being the first to cover the entire agreement.

This year's edition saw four roundtable discussions on working efficiently with partner country DAGs and making full use of the **Single-Entry Point** created by DG Trade to deal with complaints, and on ways to improve the impact of DAGs and TSD provisions. DAG members proposed methodological improvements, such as clearer language for TSD provisions, the extensive use of implementation roadmaps and generalised adoption of country-specific approaches. The discussions focused on how the DAGs can properly fulfil their advisory role, starting from the organic involvement in DAG activities of all EU institutions (including the Council) and partner countries.

Joined by **Maria Martin Prat**, Deputy Director General at DG Trade, and **Bernd Lange**, Chair of the EP Committee on International Trade, DAG members drew a picture of how far the implementation of the TSD Review has come and what obstacles are yet to be cleared. DAG members pointed out that financial and technical support is needed. They also proposed ways to increase the DAGs' institutional participation and visibility to ensure that trade agreements are both fair and representative. Chief Trade Enforcement Officer **Denis Redonnet** declared that 'DAGs should not just monitor, but aim to come up with concrete proposals': to get there, DAG members emphasised the need for continued commitment to empowering DAGs, enhancing their advisory capabilities and ensuring their active participation in all phases of trade agreement implementation.

## Opinions in the spotlight

[REX/581](#) – New growth plan and Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans

At its April plenary session, the EESC adopted an opinion on the EU's new Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, aimed at enhancing regional economic cooperation and socioeconomic

convergence. This facility, the financial pillar of the Growth Plan, will support a range of reforms to help the Western Balkans integrate into the EU single market and value chains. EESC members Ionuț Sibian and Dragica Martinović emphasised the need for a gradual, predictable and merit-based approach to EU accession, highlighting the importance of regional cooperation and closing the socioeconomic gap between the Western Balkans and the EU. The EESC also stressed the importance of maintaining the rule of law and democracy, calling for transparent guidance and the involvement of social partners and civil society in implementing the plan. [More info](#).

The enhanced follow-up of this opinion was organised in the form of a high-level civil society conference that took place on 24 May in Ljubljana: [Continuing the success story of EU enlargement – Bringing benefits to the Western Balkans in advance of accession](#).

### Current opinions and information reports

[REX/598](#) – Screening of foreign investments in the Union (*adopted by the July plenary*)

[REX/591](#) – Paving the way to EU accession for the Western Balkans

[REX/589](#) – The situation of the civil society organisations in the ASEAN countries

[REX/587](#) – Action Plan for enhancing cooperation between civil society organisations in the European Union and Kazakhstan, in the framework of the implementation of the New Strategy on Central Asia and of the Global Gateway

[REX/586](#) – Deforestation of the Amazon rainforest – impact on climate change and the global environment; consequences for companies, workers and population

[REX/585](#) – Water Politics: Empowering Youth, Women, and Indigenous and Local Communities

[REX/584](#) – Democracy in Africa – current situation and future perspectives. What role for the EESC?

[REX/582](#) – Revision of the EU Visa suspension mechanism

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