



REX newsletter | The EESC in the world

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Dear Reader,

As was widely expected, the outcome of the US election was the beginning of a **profound geopolitical shift** on the world's stage. The new American administration has introduced a conception of international relations that deviates strongly from the traditional values of multilateralism and primacy of international institutions, **values that the European Union has always defended with conviction.**

But there is more: in the new conception of American foreign policy, relations between the different parts of the world must be based on force and on a bilateral dialogue between great powers, with a reduced role for traditional allegiances, **including military alliances**, and trade agreements. It is not good to be unprepared in the face of time-changing events, so it is essential for the European response to be **rapid and effective.**

First of all, in the face of weakened transatlantic relations, it is necessary for Europeans to **narrow their ranks** and, at the same time, to **open up more and more to the outside world**: it is now clear that we need a **common European defence** to ensure our security. When it comes to trade, American tariff policy is creating new axes, such as the one hitherto unheard of between China, Japan and Korea, and is inducing important countries such as Canada and Mexico to seek other ways forward. This is what we have to do too: let us show that we believe in multilateralism by diversifying our trading partners through **fair, environmentally sustainable and mutually beneficial trade agreements!**

The European Commission has proposed a package of tariffs for American products. While it is vital to continue negotiating to avoid a large-scale trade war, it is also important to have something conspicuous to put on the table: **Europe is the largest market in the world** – the time has come to use this potential in order to protect **European interests**. I am proud to remind you that, even before the tariff madness started, in opinion [REX/594](#), the EESC had pointed out the need for 'strong leadership, including making use of existing trade-defence tools if tariffs are imposed illegally, including retaliatory tariffs, economic diplomacy action and WTO challenges'.



In a recent intervention at the [Delphi Economic Forum](#) I pointed out that, whilst we welcome the US decision to pause this tariff increase for 90 days, it is clear that such uncertainty and volatility are extremely damaging to our businesses. Our SMEs, which constitute 99% of EU companies and provide more than 85 million jobs, are particularly vulnerable and risk losing access to international markets and supply chains. The EU has everything to gain from **clear, predictable, rule-based trading conditions**, and so do our partners around the world.

The EU must finalise and implement as soon as possible **all pending multilateral trade agreements** (Mercosur, Samoa, New Zealand, Kenya, etc.) and lead the international trade agenda: a step of **significant geopolitical importance**.

Finally, the EU must take the lead on the international stage to advance the values of coexistence which are under threat today, and to show that it has something to say in the **peace negotiations for Ukraine and the**

Middle East. The European contribution can make a difference, and this is why Europe needs to speak with one voice. **Intergovernmental consultation is no longer enough**.

In times of exasperated sovereignism, this simple message may even be indigestible to part of the public opinion, but courageous and visionary politicians will need to repeat it and explain it for as long as it takes: **we need a President and a government for Europe, a European foreign policy and a European army with a European Chief of Staff**.

We need to create Europe, because it is the only way we have to **remain European**, that is, to remain the citizens of a free and peaceful continent in which **democracy and the rule of law** reign, in which those in need enjoy **health care** at affordable prices, in which those who are elderly receive a **pension** and those who are unemployed are helped to find a job instead of plunging into poverty and inactivity. Not to mention the need for a **cutting-edge education system** that is able to attract the best talents, even those who have hitherto chosen American universities. This turmoil in international relations is a big challenge, but also a clear opportunity for the EU, which can welcome **brilliant researchers and strategic investments** offering better conditions than on the other side of the Atlantic.

If we create Europe, we can reverse the current trends, which are so unfavourable to us Europeans. **But it has to be done quickly**.

Yours sincerely,
Dimitris Dimitriadis
 REX Section President

(In the picture: with Mr. Symeon G. Tsomokos, Founder & President of the Delphi Economic Forum)

North America

Building bridges across the Atlantic: the EU and Canada



On 17, 18 and 19 March, the EESC hosted meetings of **EU-Canada Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs)** and the **EU-Canada 2025 Civil Society Forum (CSF)**. The discussions over the three days underscored the shared commitment of the EU and Canada to integrating sustainability into trade, ensuring labour rights protection, and advancing environmental and gender-related policies within the CETA framework, particularly in the current challenging global context. Key officials representing the European Commission and

the Government of Canada engaged in rich exchanges with civil society, outlined the progress of the **Trade and Sustainable Development Committee (TSD)** and set objectives for the upcoming year. The event reinforced shared commitments to ongoing collaboration and stakeholder engagement in shaping the future of EU-Canada trade relations. The DAGs adopted their [Joint Statement](#). On the Civil Society Forum, you can view our [dynamic post here](#).

European Economic Area

The EU, the EEA and Switzerland



On 2 April, members of the EESC met with their counterparts from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway at the 35th meeting of the **European Economic Area Consultative Committee (EEA CC)**. The discussions, which took place at the EFTA House in Brussels, focused on European preparedness and defence, the fight against disinformation and the use of artificial intelligence in the workplace. Presentations were made by Ariane Rodert, John Comer and Franca Salis-Madinier, all of whom are EESC rapporteurs on the

respective topics.

Furthermore, Lukas Lanzrein from the Swiss Mission to the EU, provided an overview of the key elements of the package deal reached between the EU and **Switzerland** in December 2024. This was followed by contributions from Swiss social partners (who attended the meeting as observers), focusing primarily on internal discussions in Switzerland regarding wage protection.

It was agreed that the topic for the 2025 resolution and report would be 'A European Single Market for Preparedness and Defence'. This document will be prepared for the 36th meeting of the EEA CC, which will take place in Copenhagen from 9-10 December 2025.

Enlargement countries

The Albanian government at the EESC



An official study visit of the Albanian government to the EESC took place on 15 and 16 January under the heading **‘Strengthening dialogue with civil society in Albania’**. The Albanian delegation, led by Olta Manjani, Deputy Minister for Economy, Education and Innovation, participated in the meeting of the REX section. The next day, a number of discussions were held on the role of organised civil society in Albania’s EU integration

process, the role of national economic and social councils in the EU Member States and Albania, and on how the EESC works in practice, with the EESC President Oliver Röpke, group presidents, members of the EESC’s Western Balkans Follow-up Committee, EESC Secretary General and officials from the EESC Secretariat. Meetings were closely followed also by H.E. Ferit Hoxha, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Head of Mission of Albania to the EU, and Giulio Venneri, Deputy Head of the Albania Unit in the European Commission (DG ENEST).

Montenegro: horizon 2028

The 20th meeting of the [EU-Montenegro Joint Consultative Committee](#) was held on 20 March in Podgorica to discuss the Reform Agenda and Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and Agenda 2028, the implementation of the Fundamentals Cluster, the competitiveness of Montenegro and the EU in the context of the Draghi Report, social dialogue and an overview of the civil society situation in the country. The JCC members welcomed the progress of Montenegro in the accession path towards the EU and expressed hope that the country would be able to close all remaining chapters of negotiations **by the end of 2026**. The JCC insisted that civil society and citizens should be included more effectively in the negotiations process, and they reminded the Montenegrin Government and Parliament to respect all agreements between the social partners reached by consensus within the Social Council. The JCC commended the Montenegrin Government on the **newly established practice of reporting on the implementation of JCC recommendations**, and expressed hope that this would continue in the years leading up to Montenegro’s accession to the EU.



The Western Balkans can benefit from social dialogue



The EESC, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and Eurofound joined forces on 3 April in Tirana to discuss how to promote social dialogue in the Western Balkans. The event, entitled [Enhancing quality of work and life through effective social dialogue in the Western Balkans](#), brought together key stakeholders to explore challenges and opportunities in the region's labour markets and social policies. With keynote speakers such as Majlinda Dhuka, Minister of State and Chief

Negotiator of Albania, Olta Manjani, Albanian Deputy Minister of Economy, Culture and Innovation, H.E. Silvio Gonzato, Head of the EU Delegation to Albania, Oliver Röpke, President of the EESC, Pilvi Torsti, Director of the ETF, and Ivailo Kalfin, Executive Director of Eurofound, the event highlighted how social dialogue supports resilient labour markets, better working conditions, and the green and digital transitions. Discussions focused on improving living and working conditions, providing the workforce with the skills they need and expanding opportunities for young people through initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee. By working together, trade unions, employers and governments can uphold EU social and economic principles, as highlighted in the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Union of Skills. Strong tripartite partnerships, as well as the involvement of civil society, are crucial for addressing labour and skills challenges.

Komiteti Konsultativ i Përbashkët BE-Shqipëri gati për të nisur!

The EU-Albania Joint Consultative Committee ready to start!



On 4 April, EESC President, Oliver Röpke, and Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, opened the inaugural meeting of the **EU-Albania Joint Consultative Committee (JCC)**, which brings together representatives of trade unions, employers and civil society organisations from both sides, enabling them to monitor reform implementation and issue joint recommendations to the Albanian authorities and EU institutions on Albania's path towards EU membership. 'This JCC is not symbolic - it is structural', said President Röpke: 'It formalises

the voice of civil society in the EU accession process and ensures that reforms are not just passed, but shaped and supported by the people they affect to ensure a meaningful, gradual integration'. The meeting covered the state of play in EU-Albania relations, adopted rules of procedure for the JCC, and discussed the functioning of civil and social dialogue in the country. Albanian Ministers Majlinda Dhuka, Delina Ibrahimaj, and Olta Manjani took part in the proceedings, reflecting the strong institutional commitment to the JCC's success. The Albanian delegation's inclusive and transparent selection process was praised, with all six of its members also taking part in the EESC's **Enlargement Candidate Members initiative**. [Read more.](#)

The EESC and Türkiye

Due to an unforeseen event, the 43rd meeting of the EU-Türkiye Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) was postponed at the last minute, but the EESC decided to convert the event into a one-day **preparatory meeting** for its members dealing with the country, in view of the actual JCC meeting, the date of which will be confirmed at a later stage. The meeting, held on 13 March at the EESC, saw contributions from H.E. Ambassador Faruk Kaymakcı and representatives from the EEAS and DG ENEST. During the working session, EESC rapporteurs Diana Indjova, Isabel Caño Aguilar and Petru Sorin Dandea presented topics including **migration and international relations, the just transition in the context of climate change, and fair distribution of wealth and tax justice**. Each presentation was followed by a general debate.

On 25 March, EESC President Oliver Röpke issued a [statement](#) in reaction to the crackdown on democracy in Türkiye following the arrest of **Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu**.



Africa, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP)

EESC and AU ECOSOCC reaffirm commitment to gender equality at UN CSW69



On 11 March, the EESC and the African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) presented a Joint Declaration at the 69th meeting of the **UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York**, reaffirming their commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. 30 years after the adoption of the **Beijing Declaration** and the **Platform for Action**, the EESC and AU ECOSOCC acknowledge both the progress achieved

and the ongoing challenges that continue to hinder full gender equality.

The two institutions call for urgent action to accelerate progress in key areas, including women's representation in governance, the eradication of gender-based violence and the advancement of women's economic and digital inclusion. They stress that achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals** requires comprehensive and integrated approaches that mainstream gender equality across all policies. Governments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector must work together to accelerate progress and ensure that gender equality remains a global priority. [Read more.](#)

The EU and the Caribbean countries

The 8th meeting of the [CARIFORUM-EU Consultative Committee](#) took place in Nassau (The Bahamas) on 20 March. Co-chaired by Berivan Öngörür (EU) and John Robin (CARIFORUM), the meeting focused on the five-year review of the **CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)**, the situation in Haiti, the EPA's impact on the implementation of ILO core conventions and the EPA's services dimension. [Key outcomes](#) include a call for the application of the regional preference clause, for the facilitation of temporary entry for education and training, for support for the **Bridgetown Initiative** (to address climate change and debt crises) and for a reinforced consideration of marginalised groups in the EPA's application. Moreover, consultative committee members encouraged joint support for **WTO plurilateral agreements**, especially the Disciplines on Services Domestic Regulation and the Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce.



Latin America

EU and Chile: entering a new phase



On 31 January, the [EU-Chile Joint Consultative Committee](#) held its 13th meeting to reflect on past achievements and discuss the transition to the new **Advanced Framework Agreement**, which will reshape and strengthen cooperation between both parties. The discussion, with the participation of Ambassadors Claudia Gintersdorfer (EU) and Gloria Navarrete (Chile), representatives from the European Commission, Chilean civil society, and the

EESC, highlighted the importance of maintaining strong EU-Chile ties amid evolving global challenges. Key topics addressed included reinforcing democracy, human rights and civic engagement as fundamental pillars of the EU-Chile relationship, strengthening economic cooperation to promote sustainable investment, trade resilience, and support for SMEs and the circular economy, addressing global security concerns and cybersecurity cooperation to safeguard citizens' rights and digital governance, ensuring a smooth transition to the new partnership framework while preserving structured civil society dialogue.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of a [final declaration](#) outlining priorities for continued engagement and structured dialogue under the forthcoming agreement. The JCC has played a pivotal

role in shaping EU-Chile relations and, as this chapter closes, both parties remain committed to the continuation of our partnership. The next phase will focus on implementing the new agreement, while ensuring that civil society continues to play an active role in shaping the future of EU-Chile cooperation.

The Mercosur agreement in Brussels



On 18 March, the EESC's **Latin America Follow-up Committee** met to discuss key aspects of EU-Latin America relations, particularly trade agreements, regional cooperation and social development. A central topic of discussion was the **EU-Mercosur Partnership Agreement** (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay): speakers from the European Parliament, the EEAS and DG TRADE provided institutional and political perspectives, emphasising the agreement's economic benefits, market access improvements and regulatory cooperation. They also addressed concerns about

sustainability commitments, environmental responsibilities and social impacts, while underlining the agreement's role in strengthening economic ties and attracting investment to Mercosur countries.

Members and Latin American partners debated the **geopolitical significance** of the agreement within the broader framework of EU foreign policy. Discussions also covered labour rights, fair trade concerns, indigenous community protection, inclusive development and safeguarding local producers in rural areas. The meeting also featured a presentation on *Ação da Cidadania Contra a Fome e Miséria*, a Brazilian NGO dedicated to combating hunger and social exclusion. The presentation highlighted grassroots efforts to address food insecurity and extreme poverty in Brazil and other Latin American countries.



United Kingdom

Youth engagement in the EU-UK relations

On 17-18 March, two REX members participated in the joint meeting of the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly at the European Parliament premises in Brussels. Mr Cillian Lohan was invited to speak on youth opportunities, as the rapporteur of the REX opinion on [EU-UK Youth Engagement](#). He presented the opinion's main points and engaged with MEPs and UK parliamentarians on challenges and opportunities facing youth on both sides of the Channel, stressing the importance of youth for the present and future of the bilateral relationship. Both Mr Lohan and Ms Tanja Buzek (vice

Chair of the EU DAG under the TCA) attended breakout sessions on topics like AI and data protection, climate and energy cooperation and regulatory cooperation in financial services.



Trade

The way to Geneva is still relevant



On 20-21 March, a delegation of REX members travelled to Geneva for a series of meetings with international organisations on **migration, human and labour rights and multilateralism**. The delegation met high-level representatives like Ms Celeste Drake, the Deputy Director General of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and Ms Lotte Knudsen, the EU Ambassador to the UN. Other meetings included the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Throughout these talks, the delegation illustrated the

EESC's work on these topics and explored potential avenues of future collaboration.

Annual Reporting of the DAG Chairs to the INTA Committee

The **Domestic Advisory Groups** (DAGs) are set up in the framework of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) or free trade chapters within Association Agreements that the EU has with third parties. In principle, each side has its own DAG and, on the EU side, members advise the Commission's DG TRADE in particular on the trade and sustainable development (TSD) chapters.

On 19 March, Tanja Buzek, EESC coordinator for the EU DAGs, along with the Chairs of the EU DAGs for Vietnam and for Colombia-Peru-Ecuador, as well as the Canada DAG, made an annual presentation to the **INTA Committee in the European Parliament**. Ms Buzek praised the cooperation with INTA as an important element of strengthening the DAGs, and explained that MEPs would be regularly updated on the EU DAG meetings. She also expressed her hope that the DAG members would be invited to the EP's monitoring groups and informed on EP missions and activities.

From the **EU-Vietnam** DAG, the Chair highlighted current difficulties, despite EU hopes to upgrade trade relationships: there is particular concern regarding Vietnam's restriction of civil society organisations, including its active vetting of their participation in the Joint Forum under the EU-Vietnam FTA. Regarding the **Canada** DAG, strong emphasis was placed on the role of civil society in ensuring that economic growth aligns with sustainability objectives. Against the backdrop of tumultuous relations with the U.S. and a challenging global context, both affirmed the significance of the EU-Canada alliance as like-minded partners. Looking to the DAG on **Colombia-Peru-Ecuador**, stronger enforcement mechanisms of TSD chapters were called for, as well as better support for civil society participation and labour rights protections. In particular, some labour violations were signalled in Peru and Colombia, with Peru showing a serious lack of commitment in responding adequately and in a timely manner to these concerns.

Overall, speakers underscored the need for better and stronger support to guarantee civil society's participation, also ahead of the entry into force of new trade agreements. The ultimate goal would be to have a structured dialogue to **monitor and advise during the negotiation of trade agreements**.



Opinions in the spotlight

[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 (adopted on 26.3.2025)

This own-initiative opinion focuses on Kazakhstan as the leading country of Central Asia, a region which is increasingly high on the EU agenda, and which has expressed a strong interest in closer relations with Europe. The document contains a reflection on the Global Gateway, the new EU Strategy for Central Asia and the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) between the European Union and Kazakhstan. An important part of the text is based on the results of a fact-finding mission that took place last October in Astana and Almaty: the EESC delegation met Kazakh civil society activists and authorities. The main finding is that the country is in full transition, from an economic, political and social point of view, with huge cooperation potential. In proposing an Action Plan for interaction with Central Asian civil society, the EESC expresses the view that EU-Kazakhstan relations should prioritise sustainability, human rights and inclusiveness, and consider environmental, social and geopolitical concerns. It also advocates for civic and social dialogue to be formalised along the lines of the good practices existing with other regions, such as the Western Balkans. Furthermore, the EU could help support the development of civil society in Kazakhstan by creating a programme for the exchange of experiences between civil servants, as well as by increasing the educational opportunities for young Kazakhs through the Erasmus programme.

Ongoing opinions and information reports

[REX/603](#) – Joint white paper for European Defence Readiness 2030

[REX/602](#) – Diplomacy and disability

[REX/601](#) – Social Media and AI Tool Algorithms and Responsibility for the Visibility of High-Quality and Fact-Based Information on Eastern Europe

[REX/600](#) – Looking to the future of EU-UK relations: 2026 Review of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) from a civil society perspective

[REX/598](#) – The importance of institutionalizing civic and social dialogue in EU candidate and partner countries

[REX/597](#) – Blue Diplomacy and water cooperation – solutions to relieve the pressure of climate induced migration

[REX/596](#) – Fragmentation of supply chains and impact on the cost of living

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

Opinions adopted by the Plenary Session of 26-27 March

[REX/595](#) – Moldova Growth Plan

[REX/594](#) – Competitiveness and economic security – how should EU trade policy contribute to the objectives of the Draghi report?

[REX/588](#) – EU-India Strategic Partnership

[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

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