



## REX newsletter | The EESC in the world

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Dear Reader,

In September, the **European Economic and Social Committee** will undergo a full renewal. It is therefore time to look at what we have achieved over the past five years, during which I had the honour of chairing the EESC's **Section for External Relations**.

When I took over the REX presidency, **the world was very different**: 2020 marked the start of the **Covid pandemic**, a highly disruptive event with serious consequences for the economy and society, but also politics and geopolitics. In 2021, after **Joe Biden** became president of the United States, starting the **post-Covid recovery** and taking his country back into the **Paris Agreement**, the European Union immediately responded to the US' return to the international scene: it proposed a **Trade and Technology Council** to strengthen our cooperation after the demise of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

2021 is also when the **European Green Deal** started transforming our economy and society, together with the **Digital Transition**. The idea, still valid today, was that the EU would lead the rest of the world by example towards a greener future. The Green Deal contains a number of mechanisms for international cooperation, and one of the first issues considered by its creators was the need to accompany oil and gas producing countries, including Russia, towards a **just transition**.

However, this European proposal for global cooperation received a severe blow from the **war in Ukraine** in 2022: the EU responded to this challenge by mobilising the **European Peace Facility** to

support the country under attack, by welcoming refugees and by granting Ukraine, together with **Moldova**, the status of candidate country.

Another achievement of 2022 is the **Strategic Compass**, an action plan designed to strengthen the European security and defence policy. We need such a policy more than ever today, in an increasingly difficult international context with the **Middle East** in flames, something far beyond the long-standing conflicts that have gripped Yemen, Libya, Syria, Lebanon and Sudan for years. With the Hamas attack on **Israel** of October 2023, a period of serious instability began, leading to the opening of several fronts and heavy bombardments of **Gaza**.

Meanwhile, the civil war in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** continues, France has seen its influence in **Africa** weakened by a series of Russian-backed coups, **Armenia** has lost in Nagorno-Karabakh, and **Georgia** and **Belarus** are prisoners of pro-Russian governments that rig elections.

After 2024, the US withdrew again from a series of international agreements absolutely crucial to the future of the planet, meaning that Europe has to assume climate leadership and pick up the pieces of the international system for a second time. In particular, the potentially destructive **tariff policy** has confronted the EU with its responsibilities as the **world's largest trading bloc**: having finally taken the road to ratification of the **Mercosur Agreement**, Europe has launched new trade agreements that we hope will soon be concluded, such as the one with **India**. The EESC will play its part, since the Committee is responsible for the secretariat of the DAGs, the **Domestic Advisory Groups** monitoring the effects of the EU's trade agreements with the rest of the world.

The EU should maintain this course, defending international cooperation and multilateralism from the attacks to which they are now subject as a result of wars of aggression and anachronistic tariffs. For a start, we must continue the welcome reset with the **United Kingdom** and the relaunch of close relations with **Brazil**: the EESC has resumed its fruitful relations with Brazilian civil society after an interruption due to our Brazilian counterpart being abolished by the Bolsonaro government.

Furthermore, the EU needs to talk to **China**, an economic superpower with a socio-political system very different from our own but with which we share many interdependencies and a common interest in **climate protection**. We have regular exchanges with our Chinese counterpart, and we have been working hard on **climate diplomacy and water diplomacy**, especially with African and Latin American countries. Let me draw your attention to the opinion on *Addressing the interdependence between peace and climate change: need for renewed global diplomacy*, of which I am the rapporteur. The text submitted to the July plenary recognises the multifaceted nature of **climate change**, including its potential for global insecurity, conflict and displacement, and underlines the urgent need to integrate climate resilience and environmental sustainability into foreign and security policy.

Last year, the **European elections** were held, reconfirming the governing pro-European alliance, while **Poland** returned to the group of major countries that can be counted on to secure the future of our continent. Despite the favourable currents being enjoyed by anti-European forces, it is clear that EU countries will only be able to ensure prosperity, competitiveness and democracy for their peoples if they continue to **stand together**, especially when it comes to **defence and foreign policy**. To achieve

this, our governments must be convinced, but a greater awareness is also required on the part of **public opinion**, which at the moment seems divided on its understanding of European politics. It will be hard, but we have to insist on this, since **unity is the only way for Europe** to remain a viable actor on the international stage and to uphold our values and maintain our prosperity. We should never forget this basic fact.

Far from the old-fashioned self-criticism of the alleged democracy deficit, it will be useful to focus on the hybrid war that is being waged against the European Union in the form of **disinformation**. In recent years, the EESC has taken action on this front by carrying out public **initiatives and campaigns** against disinformation in different countries, as reported in previous issues of this newsletter. This fight goes hand in hand with a more general effort to work together with non-EU civil society, particularly from the **enlargement countries** but also from the rest of the world, starting with our neighbours on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and in Africa through to the countries of Central and Eastern Asia, and from Canada and the USA to Latin America and, with the entry into force of the respective trade agreements, New Zealand, and soon we hope Australia too, without overlooking our work on the Arctic, the EFTA countries and Türkiye.

To conclude, I would like to mention that the Committee is working on an opinion concerning the **New Pact for the Mediterranean** as its main priority for 2025 regarding the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, and that we are ready to share our long-standing experience in relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries to support the implementation of the **Samoa Agreement**. This offers new opportunities to deepen the EU's partnerships in key areas such as climate action, human development, peace and security and inclusive governance.

**Civil society** is crucial to supporting the diplomatic efforts of the EU's major institutions. This topic was discussed on 25 June at the **European Public Diplomacy Week**, a 'Team Europe' effort that will take place annually to allow all European institutions and bodies to showcase their respective contributions to jointly promoting the pivotal role of the EU in the world. Under the slogan **One message, multiple voices**.

I wish all the best to my designated successor as REX section president, Stefano Palmieri.

**Dimitris Dimitriadis**  
REX Section President



## Belarus

### Siarhei Tsikhanouski finally free



On 21 June 2025, **Siarhei Tsikhanouski**, leader of the Belarusian opposition who had been in prison since May 2020 on false accusations by the Lukashenka regime, was released with several other political prisoners and reached Vilnius safely. 'I am deeply grateful for the incredible support we received', said his wife **Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya**, who has been leading the Belarusian opposition in exile since her husband was arrested.

The release of political prisoners took place after a visit to Belarus by General Keith Kellogg, US Special Envoy for Ukraine, but it is part of a wider political effort, in which the European Union never stopped following the case. After Mr Tsikhanouski's release, EESC

President **Oliver Röpkе** issued a [statement](#) congratulating him and the other political prisoners, and saying that efforts will continue for the hundreds of brave Belarusians who remain behind bars, including journalists, activists and trade unionists.

### Belarus high on the EESC's agenda

Just a few days before, at its June plenary session of 18-19 June, the EESC reaffirmed its strong support for a democratic Belarus by signing a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with the Belarusian democratic forces led by **Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya**. This MoU formalises a new phase of collaboration aimed at supporting Belarusian civil society, promoting human rights, and strengthening independent media and trade unions amid ongoing repression in Belarus. The signing was part of a wider debate featuring key Belarusian figures, including trade-unionist **Maksim Pazniakou** and film director **Andrey Gnyot**, who highlighted the regime's crackdown on activists, journalists and workers. The EESC emphasised its commitment to giving a voice to silenced Belarusians and to building a shared European future based on democracy and dignity.

The Committee is currently drafting an **information report** on the right to accurate information about Eastern and Central Europe (REX/601, see heading 'Ongoing opinions and information reports' of this newsletter), which began after research on Belarus showed that the algorithms prioritise the regime's official communiqués over accurate information about the situation in this Eastern European country.



## Enlargement countries

### 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EESC's Civil Society Forum with the Western Balkans

The 10th [Western Balkans Civil Society Forum](#) (Budva, Montenegro, 12-13 May) was organised with the support of the European Commission, the Open Society Foundation-Western Balkans, the Western Balkans Fund and the Regional Cooperation Council. It brought together representatives of trade unions, employers and civil society organisations from all the Western Balkan countries; representatives of the European Commission and the European Training Foundation; international organisations such as the OECD, World Bank, ILO, Transport Community and Central European Free Trade Association; and networks such as the Balkan Civil Society Development Network, SOLIDARNOST network of trade unions, Coalition for Gender Equality in the EU Accession Process, Western Balkans' Network for Tackling Undeclared Work and Roma Foundation for Europe. The **first day** focused on speeding up EU accession for the Western Balkans and the role of organised civil society in the membership negotiations and the growth plan for the Western Balkans. The **second day** was about the contribution of social partners and civil society organisations to implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights in the Western Balkans.

In the [final declaration](#), participants reaffirmed their strong support for a credible, merit-based EU accession process for the Western Balkans. They welcomed 2030 as a target date for readiness for EU membership, encouraged proactive resolution of bilateral disputes, and called for enhanced civic space, media freedom and the rule of law. The declaration stresses the crucial role of civil society and social partners in the accession process and urges the EU institutions to strengthen their involvement by following initiatives such as the EESC's **Enlargement Candidate Members**. The Forum also highlighted the importance of fully integrating social partners and civil society organisations in implementing the **EU Growth Plan and Reform and Growth Facility**. Participants underscored the need to tackle poverty, inequality and undeclared work, with a focus on empowering women, Roma communities and other vulnerable groups. Organised civil society was recognised as a key driver of democratic resilience, social justice and successful EU integration across the region.



## EESC President and Montenegrin Prime Minister met to discuss EU accession



On 12 June, to kickstart the 10th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum, EESC President **Oliver Röpke** met in Podgorica with Prime Minister **Milojko Spajić** for an exchange on Montenegro's EU path. The discussion centred on how to ensure that the Growth Plan and related reforms translate into tangible benefits for all citizens, including the need for meaningful monitoring structures, public trust in reforms, and transparency in investment deals. Mr Spajić reiterated Montenegro's goal of closing all chapters by the end of 2026 and joining the EU by 2028. He welcomed continued cooperation with the EESC and reaffirmed his government's commitment to EU membership and socio-economic development.

Mr Röpke also met with Minister **Naida Nišić**, joined by members of the Social Council. Discussions focused on strengthening tripartite social dialogue, the role of civil society in implementing Montenegro's Reform Agenda, and the alignment of social policies with the EU acquis. The EESC President welcomed Montenegro's establishment of a Directorate for Social Dialogue and its active efforts to reform labour laws, representativeness, social entrepreneurship and disability inclusion. He stressed the importance of respecting agreements reached in the Social Council and engaging social partners systematically in EU-related reforms.

## Serbian students' visit to the EESC following their 'ultramarathon' from Serbia



On 12 May, a brave group of Serbian students arrived in Brussels after an extraordinary 18-day, 2000-kilometre relay '**ultramarathon**' from **Serbia to Belgium**. Their inspiring journey was a powerful statement raising awareness of democratic backsliding and calling for change in Serbia. The students' relentless effort culminated on 13 May with a number of meetings with EU officials at the highest level and a warm [reception at the EESC](#), where Vice-President **Laurentiu Ploşceanu** personally welcomed them. In his address, he praised young Serbians for their courage, dedication and commitment to democratic values. The initiative has drawn significant international attention, spotlighting the vital role young people play in pushing for democratic reforms and civic accountability.

## EU-Serbia Joint Consultative Committee meets in Brussels amid growing unrest in Serbia

On 7 April, the EU-Serbia Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) convened for its 19th meeting in Brussels, issuing a strong [joint declaration](#) delivering an urgent message: Serbia's civil society, young people and media landscape need robust support and protection. Both EESC President **Oliver Röpke** and Vice-President **Laurentiu Ploşceanu** stressed the JCC's role in ensuring that young people and civil society remain central to Serbia's European path. While **Danijel Apostolović**, Head of the Serbian Mission to the EU, outlined Serbia's progress towards EU accession, **Gordan Bosanac**, Member of the European Parliament, and **Jiří Plečičký**, Head of Unit for Serbia and Kosovo\* at the European Commission's DG

ENEST, emphasised the importance of political will, judicial independence and rule of law reforms in unlocking further negotiation clusters. **Igor Bandović**, Director of the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, and **Maja Stojanović** of Citizens' Initiatives, provided their perspectives on the mass student protests taking place in Serbia over the previous six months and gave first-hand insights into the challenges faced by Serbian civil society, including smear campaigns, surveillance and intimidation. Looking ahead to the EXPO 2027, **Miloš Đorđević** from Transparency Serbia and **Vladimir Jovanović** from the Union of Serbian Engineers, addressed the need for transparent legal frameworks and robust oversight of infrastructure and procurement processes.

This JCC meeting was as a powerful reminder that for Serbia, safeguarding civic space, ensuring media freedom, and empowering young people are not peripheral concerns, but the very pillars of a credible European future.

Kosovo (\*) - This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



## The Arctic

### Europe and the future of the Arctic



On 26-27 June, a trio of events in Kittilä, Finland, explored the Arctic's present and future from different perspectives.

At the **EU Arctic Forum**, policymakers, scientists and stakeholders came together to strengthen international cooperation and explore sustainable development pathways in the face of climate and geopolitical challenges. In his [opening remarks](#), **Costas Kadis**, EU Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans, reaffirmed the EU's constructive engagement in the Arctic. The next generation of Arctic leaders gathered for the **Arctic Youth Dialogue** to shape policy and promote innovation. In the lead-up to the Forum, 36 young participants jointly drew up [policy recommendations](#) across four key areas: sustainable transport, overconsumption, youth entrepreneurship and eco-friendly industry. Finally, the **Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue** placed the rights, voices and knowledge of indigenous communities at the centre, reinforcing the EU's commitment to inclusivity, cultural preservation and participatory

governance. In the panel discussion on *Ripening opportunities, making the Arctic attractive*, EESC member **Anders Ladefoged**, who is rapporteur for the EU's Arctic policy, noted the strong support from Arctic civil society for EU efforts in the areas of regional development, research and sustainability, and also recognition of the relevance of the single market to Arctic businesses. Amid ongoing transitions – including climate change, demographic trends, renewable energy production, raw material extraction, and the growing need for defence infrastructure and civil preparedness – it is vital that civil society, including indigenous peoples, can give input and has a voice in shaping Arctic policy.

## Euromed

### تعزيز الروابط في منطقة البحر الأبيض المتوسط - Building bridges in the Mediterranean Sea



On 23-24 June 2025, the EESC co-organised the 29th **Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions** in Istanbul, together with the European Commission (DG MENA), the Union for the Mediterranean and the Anna Lindh Foundation. This year, the summit was dedicated to the **New Pact for the Mediterranean**, providing valuable input into [REX/606](#), which is focused on the same topic. In addition to the main theme,

summit participants also discussed the topics **Promoting Entrepreneurship in the Euromed Region** (linked to [REX/604: Boosting Sustainable Growth and Quality Jobs in Euromed – Tapping the Potential of Women and Young People](#)), as well as **Blue Diplomacy and Water Cooperation** (linked to [REX/597: Blue Diplomacy and Water Cooperation – Climate Migration](#)).

## East Asia

### Japan meets Europe



On 23-24 June, the EESC hosted joint meetings between EU and Japan civil society, in a first for our Japanese counterpart. On 23 June, the EU DAG members together with other civil society representatives from labour and business organisations, environmental groups, and various CSOs from the EU and Japan exchanged with officials from the European Commission and from the Japanese Government on the implementation of the **Trade and Sustainable Development** provisions of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. Key themes were green shipping corridors, labour rights and ILO standards, corporate due diligence and the EU-Japan Green Alliance.

On 24 June, the EU DAG organised a workshop to explore how **artificial intelligence** is reshaping the workplace and driving economic competitiveness. This hybrid event brought together EU and Japanese stakeholders to discuss AI's role in transforming job profiles, promoting innovation and raising ethical and policy challenges. It also focused on how AI can support sustainable and inclusive growth in both regions. The Japanese guests also had the opportunity to visit the European Parliament together with

the EU DAG members and attend a session of the International Trade Committee of the European Parliament, where they were greeted by INTA chair **Bernd Lange**.

### **Vietnam and the implementation of its Free Trade Agreement with the EU**



The **EU-Vietnam Domestic Advisory Group (DAG)** met on 17 June in Brussels to discuss the relationship between the EU and Vietnam with representatives from DG TRADE, DG INTPA, the EEAS and MEP **Saskia Bricmont**. Key updates included recent administrative reforms in Vietnam aimed at economic efficiency, the EU's ongoing financial and technical cooperation in the country – notably in the areas of climate, governance and responsible business conduct – and an initial

reaction to the new Trade Union Law.

Following the meeting, the EU DAG prepared a statement noting that: EU cooperation with Vietnam is growing despite a **lack of progress on social and human rights**, with questions arising about the EU's political priorities with regard to the country; despite assurances when the FTA was signed, Vietnam **has yet to ratify key ILO conventions** five years later, raising doubts about the FTA's legal impact; the implementation of the TSD chapter needs a **healthy civic space for civil society organisations**, but Vietnamese CSOs are strictly controlled, making consultation very difficult; **social media restrictions** in Vietnam limit transparency and communication; more clarity is needed on how the EU's **Global Gateway** affects Vietnam, and all EU DGs should incorporate **human rights** into their Vietnam work; initial analysis of Vietnam's **new trade union law** has raised concerns over the effectiveness of the law for workers, while concerns remain over the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour's role as the EU's trade union partner in discussions; effective responses to **human rights violations** remain a critical issue, with the government refusing to discuss the matter; there is **no cooperation on animal welfare**, which may have consequences for human health.

### **EU-China Round Table on connectivity and climate**

The 20th meeting of the [EU-China Round Table](#) was held in Madrid, on the premises of the Spanish ESC, on 9-10 June. The meeting was co-chaired by EESC President **Oliver Röpke** and China ESC Vice-President **Shu Qiming**. On the EU side, reports were prepared by **Stefano Palmieri** and **Jacek Krawczyk** on the EU's Global Gateway strategy and China's Belt and Road Initiative, and by **Antje Gerstein** on climate action and finance. In the first working session, which focused on **bridging the global connectivity and infrastructure gap**, Head of Programs at the African Union ECOSOCC, **Kyeretwie Osei**, emphasised that local priorities must be considered and projects should create employment for young Africans. The second topic focused on strengthening EU-China cooperation on **climate action and finance** in view of the upcoming COP30 in Belém. A key issue is China's self-identification as a developing country, which the EU disputes given Chinese high-tech achievements and growing prosperity. The discussions were open and reflected mutual respect, and informal conversations also revealed that support for Putin's war of aggression in Ukraine is less widespread in China than we often assume. Later on, REX President **Dimitris Dimitriadis** met in Brussels with the Deputy Head of the Chinese Mission to the EU to brief him on the meeting and discuss the next steps.



## Latin America

### The EESC at EuroLat 2025

On 1-3 June, the **Euro-Latin American Joint Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat)** held its plenary session in Lima (Peru), with the participation of three EESC members. EuroLat is the biggest inter-parliamentary delegation of the European Parliament, bringing together 75 MEPs and 75 Latin American parliamentarians, and the Committee has an observer status stemming from the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Parliament. A key session was the EuroLat meeting with **civil society**, which had as main topics the impact of international aid reductions on civic spaces, and extractivism and its climate and social consequences in Latin America. The EESC delegation also contributed to debates of the committees on sustainable development and on economic and commercial affairs. Our members presented the EESC's 2024 opinion on **deforestation**, stressing Peru's role as the second-largest Amazon country and calling for measures mirroring Brazil's efforts to combat illegal logging. Plenary debate discussions focused on the delayed **EU-Mercosur Agreement**, a topic which is politically sensitive in the EU, and broader trade and sustainability issues in EU-Latin America relations.



## Joint DAGs' event in Costa Rica



From 24 to 26 June 2025, a delegation of the EESC and the EU Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) travelled to San José to meet Central American DAG counterparts under the **EU-Central America Association Agreement**. The programme included a joint workshop on regional climate vulnerabilities and the impact of EU sustainability legislation on SMEs and value chains, as well as a DAGs' meeting on 12 years of the Agreement's implementation and on ways to enhance civil society's role in sustainable trade governance. These discussions continued at the **Civil Society Dialogue Forum** with the Trade and Sustainable Development Board. A key outcome was the adoption of the [2025 Joint DAGs' Declaration](#),

outlining shared priorities such as climate resilience, labour rights, civic space, support to MSMEs, and alignment with EU sustainability standards.

The delegation also met with Ambassador **Pierre-Louis Lempereur**, Head of the EU Delegation to Costa Rica, as well as **Eric Jeanjean** and **Dirk Niehaus**, presidents of the EU Chambers of Commerce in Costa Rica, for exchanges on EU-CA trade and business cooperation. Finally, the EESC was honoured to meet former Costa Rican Presidents **Óscar Arias Sánchez** (Nobel Peace Prize 1987, in the picture) and **Luis Guillermo Solís**, and held an emotional dialogue with **human rights defenders** from across the region, reaffirming the Committee's solidarity with civil society.

## North America

### The EESC, Canada and the USA



The meeting of the EESC's Transatlantic Relations Follow-up Committee took place on 28 April in Brussels. It hosted a number of prominent guests from both sides of the Atlantic, including **Bernd Althusmann**, Head of Canada Office of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, **Andre Von Walter**, Head of Trade and Economic Section in the EU Delegation in Canada, and **Eva Gross** from the USA and Canada Division in the European External Action Service (EEAS). In a complex geopolitical context where transatlantic ties are being redefined, the Committee discussed strengthening EU-

Canada relations as a result of unpredictable US policies under the current presidency and new economic challenges and efforts to diversify trade via CETA. The Committee discussed the US administration's disruptive approach, its effect on diplomacy, and the challenges posed for EU-US relations. The Committee got involved in the preparations for the upcoming EESC mission to the USA.

# United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

## EU-UK DAG Joint meetings 2025



On 23-24 June, the **Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs)** set up under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and tasked with advising on its implementation, held their fourth joint meeting in London, at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The UK and EU DAGs' attention was focussed on the 19 May **EU-UK bilateral summit** and its outcomes, which were welcomed as a step in the right direction to be decisively built upon – not least with the upcoming TCA review in 2026. The second day was dedicated to the third Civil Society Forum (CSF) organised by the UK FCDO. Open to civil society organisations representing businesses and employers, trade unions and other workers' representatives, NGOs and academics, this year's edition of the CSF discussed trade in services and goods, regulatory cooperation and the level playing field,

energy and climate change.

## Mobility across the island of Ireland after Brexit



On 11 June, an [All-Island Stakeholder Forum](#) took place for the first time, organised by the EESC together with an All-Island Advisory Group of nine representative workers, employers and civic organisations from both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

This first edition of the Forum, whose main focus was **Mobility across the island of Ireland after Brexit**, began as an EESC initiative contributing to the development of the EU-UK relationship and complements the European Commission and the UK

Government commitments to stakeholder engagement in the Windsor Framework. It gathered the widest possible range of business, worker and civil society stakeholders on the island, to share insights and expertise. Participants adopted specific recommendations, which the **EESC's EU-UK Follow-up Committee** will share with relevant EU institutions and bodies, the UK Government and the joint EU-UK bodies managing the implementation of the Windsor Framework and the wider EU-UK relationship.

## Trade

### Joint event - Living Incomes and Living Wages Conference

On May 20, Fairtrade and the Fair Trade Advocacy Office (FTAO) hosted the event [Bridging Policy and Practice: Advancing Living Incomes & Living Wages in Agricultural Supply Chains](#), in partnership with the EESC.

This conference brought together policymakers, companies, academics and civil society to explore how public policies can enable living incomes and living wages for workers and smallholder farmers in global agri-food supply chains, while also showcasing best practices and ongoing initiatives.

The event built on the Public Policy Roadmap on Living Income and Living Wage in Global Agricultural Supply Chains, recently published by Fairtrade, which draws attention to the options public authorities have to foster living incomes and living wages, highlighting their role as regulators, economic actors and partners.



### Trade Committee mission to Geneva 2025



On 10-11 June, the International Trade Follow-up Committee carried out its annual mission to Geneva. The EESC members held meetings with high-level officials from the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, such as Deputy Director General, Ambassador Jean-Marie Paugam, and Chief Economist Ralph Ossa.

The programme included delegations from the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** and the **World Meteorological Organisation (WMO)**, as well as high-level diplomats from the EU and important partner countries such as Japan, Singapore, Brazil and Canada. The discussions focused on the progress of the WTO's main ongoing dossiers ahead of the 14th **Ministerial Conference (MC14)**. The shared outlook was sober and realistic, but with a strong commitment to the enduring benefits of the WTO – especially in such uncertain times for the rule-based multilateral trading system – and to finding ways to move forward. Supply chains featured high on the agenda and were extensively discussed, not least their resilience and sustainability in terms of their social and environmental dimensions.

## Opinions in the spotlight

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

This opinion adopted by the July plenary session supports a European defence strategy that integrates military readiness with civil preparedness, social resilience, diplomacy, international law and the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights. The EESC believes that the EU must urgently address hybrid and conventional threats, reduce dependency on external players and strengthen strategic autonomy. The opinion explains that the EU must act swiftly to close critical capability gaps, mobilising the necessary instruments to bolster the security of the EU and enhance the protection of its citizens.

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

This opinion adopted by the July plenary session takes stock of the recent important developments in the EU-UK relationship – the reset, the 19 May summit etc. – and provides a comprehensive assessment and overview of civil society’s needs, challenges and priorities in view of the upcoming TCA review in 2026. The rapporteur and vice-chair of the EU DAG under the TCA, Tanja Buzek, stressed that, while the recent results are certainly a welcome step in the right direction, the momentum must be sustained and the TCA review opportunity should not be wasted. She underlined the role that civil society has been playing in the TCA’s implementation and beyond, most notably via the DAGs, and called for its prompt, full and meaningful engagement for the steps ahead.

### **[REX/599](#) - Addressing the interdependence between peace and climate change: need for renewed global diplomacy**

This opinion adopted by the July plenary session underlines that climate change is no longer a distant threat: it is here, accelerating, and disrupting the foundations of human security. Rising temperatures, extreme weather, vanishing resources are not only environmental challenges, but geopolitical flashpoints, since they threaten livelihoods, force migration, spark competition, and can thus provoke conflict. The European Union has the tools, the institutions and the global credibility to lead, but leadership now means more than words: it means weaving climate into the very fabric of our foreign and security policies. Climate action can no longer be seen as separate from peacebuilding, but as an essential component of it.

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

This opinion adopted by the June plenary session represents the REX section’s contribution to the EESC umbrella opinion on the cost-of-living crisis, aimed at examining the diverse facets of this complex issue and putting forward the Committee’s proposals to tackle it. The rapporteur and REX section president, Dimitris Dimitriadis, noted the significant impact that a growing cost of living has on citizens and businesses, disproportionately affecting lower income households and SMEs. Given the key role that supply chains play in determining prices, the EESC calls on the EU to step up its preparedness and act on several fronts, including trade agreements.

## **Ongoing opinions and information reports**

### **[REX/601](#) – Social media and AI algorithms: ensuring the right to accurate information and the visibility of high-quality content across Europe, especially about Eastern and Central Europe**

In the era of social media and AI algorithms, and of disinformation, the image conveyed by the web on a certain region of the world can influence its geopolitics. In the case of the EU, prejudices and foreign propaganda against Eastern Europe put its EU integration at risk. The information report examines the role of AI algorithms and their impact on the visibility of content about Eastern Europe, reflects on how to encourage social media platforms to promote high-quality and fact-based content, and identifies language stereotypes in traditional media and their amplification by the algorithms. Desirable institutional follow-up to these actions would be recommendations for amending the Digital Services Act concerning platform accountability for misinformation relating to Eastern Europe, support for the development of EU-funded initiatives in favour of media literacy and algorithmic transparency, and collaboration with other EU institutions such as the European Parliament to encourage cooperation with tech platforms.

[REX/606](#) - A new Pact for the Mediterranean

[REX/605](#) - The role of social partners and civil society in applicant countries – supporting the transition to European values on democracy, human rights, labour rights and the rule of law in view of enlargement

[REX/604](#) - Boosting sustainable growth and quality jobs in Euromed: promoting entrepreneurship and tapping the potential of women and young people

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

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

## Opinions adopted by the Plenary Session of 16-17 July

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

[REX/599](#) - Addressing the interdependence between peace and climate change: need for renewed global diplomacy

[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/603](#) - White paper on the future of European defence

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