



REX newsletter | The EESC in the world

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Dear reader,



In its latest Strategic Foresight Report ***Resilience 2.0 - Empowering the EU towards 2040 and beyond***, the European Union introduced a new concept of resilience which will steer us through dramatically altered circumstances.

The **pandemic**, for instance, disrupted value chains and triggered the realisation that some production, such as vaccines and health devices, must be controlled within each country or bloc of countries like the EU because it is fundamental to security. The health response to the pandemic by public hospitals is a strategic resource (now being underestimated in some countries), as are the critical materials needed to continue our **green and digital transitions**.

Russia's unjustified and cowardly aggression against Ukraine of 24 February 2022 was another watershed. It has brought war back to our continent and placed the security of our borders at the heart of our strategic agenda, along with solidarity in the form of the essential support we have been providing to the attacked and wounded Ukraine. We hope that a just peace can be achieved as soon as possible, with the bill for reconstruction delivered to the aggressor: yes, that bill must cover economic and financial losses, but even more importantly it must factor in the human lives lost on both sides.

The war against Ukraine broke a fundamental principle that had existed in Europe since the end of the Second World War: you cannot change national borders through force. It also inevitably led the EU to rethink its defence strategies for the EU as a whole and for the Eastern, Baltic and Scandinavian border in particular. The war is also having significant consequences for our **energy autonomy**, requiring coordinated environmental energy policy responses within the EU.

Although the Ukrainian conflict has acquired paramount importance for the EU due to its proximity, the loss of life and the social and economic impact, it is not the only conflict in the world today.

In **Palestine**, Israel's disproportionate response to the craven terrorist attack perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023 ignited another conflict that led to the destruction of much of the Gaza Strip. That conflict is now being halted by a truce — although we do not yet know how long it will last if the prerequisites for a genuine peace between Israelis and Palestinians are not in place. Peace must be built on solid foundations, not on the showy joke of a reconstruction which was being presented by studios in London and New York while bombs were still raining down on Gaza.

Beyond these two conflicts, there is a whole series of **forgotten wars**. The war in **Sudan** is one such war, and we are talking about it again thanks to the satellite images transmitted by the Humanitarian Research Laboratory of the American University of Yale of probable mass killings in and around Al-Fashir. There are other conflicts plaguing **Africa**: in the Democratic Republic of Congo against M23 rebels supported by Rwanda, in Somalia, in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger (the Sahel), as well as in Ethiopia and Mozambique.

This difficult situation forces us to think seriously about how to ensure the worldwide availability of **global public goods** such as peace, health security, a sustainable environment (safeguarding sanctuaries fundamental to our existence like rainforests, the Arctic, the Antarctic and oceans), the eradication of poverty, global economic governance capable of ensuring economic and financial stability, and fair world trade.

These goods are fundamental for the coexistence of nations, since availability to one does not diminish availability to others. They are all present in Article 3 TEU and we in the House of Civil Society have the right and duty to make sense out of those words. We need to step in for:

- **peace** anywhere in the world, from Ukraine to Gaza to Darfur;
- **human rights** that are currently disregarded when children are kidnapped from Ukraine or civilians are killed and humiliated in Gaza;
- **social and labour rights** that support the social and market economy that is the envy of the entire world;
- **fair and sustainable competition** which complies with trade regulations and social and environmental rights, and does not penalise those who compete with due regard for the rules of the game.

To achieve this, **Europe must become a global player once again** as well as the point of reference that it has been for many countries: it must not be relegated to the role of bit part by the rivalry between two opposing mastodons, the United States and China. Europe should come back to the political arena, inspire the rest of the world and have the courage to **make its voice heard**.

The Europe we want will not be humiliated by accepting a **trade agreement** imposed by an American administration gradually shifting away from the liberal and democratic culture that has been the basis of transatlantic relations for the last 80 years. An agreement signed in a golf club in Scotland with the American president as the “golf player” and Europeans reduced to the role of caddies. A deal which made the Financial Times claim that Europe had sold its soul to Trump by sacrificing any possibility of denouncing the US administration's violation of the international rules laid down by the World Trade Organization. Faced with the same challenge of tariffs, other global players have reacted very differently — not just China, but also Canada, Brazil and Mexico.

I am bound and determined to ensure that in these new scenarios where predatory global players such as autocratic nation-states propped up by huge multinationals are emerging, the EESC cannot and must not fail to support the European Union in speaking out for a Europe that continues to uphold the

principles and values enshrined in its Treaties, in the UN Charter of Universal Rights and in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, including respect for the rule of law in the EU and beyond.

That is what we set out to do in the REX section: at every opportunity, we try to find a shared solution to the issues presented to us, both when preparing opinions and during missions outside the EU. We will do this by analysing the situation and proposing policy recommendations — the challenge will not be easy but we will overcome it with all our strength and professional skills, since we owe it to the civil society that we are called upon to represent.

Stefano Palmieri
REX section president

New from the REX section meeting



On 7 November, the REX section held its first meeting of the new term with a session dedicated to the current geopolitical landscape. The debate, informed by the EEAS's strategic foresight, highlighted that Europe is navigating unknown lands, where various **megatrends** — such as climate emergency and demographic crisis — intersect with immediate cataclysms like the war in Ukraine.

At the forefront of the discussion was the danger that the European Union may **become irrelevant** on the global stage. Speakers warned that the EU is viewed as fragmented, resulting in its absence from critical global forums and agreements. It was stressed that the EU risks being relegated to a corner unless it rapidly becomes **faster, more united and more courageous** in affirming its values.

Three existential challenges were identified that the EU must tackle to achieve genuine **strategic autonomy**:

1. **Defence and resilience:** We need to strengthen our preparedness against military threats and societal hybrid threats, such as disinformation campaigns and foreign interference.
2. **Securing the neighbourhood:** The Union must take action to stabilise its immediate vicinity — from the Black Sea to the Southern Mediterranean — where resource competition is stoking conflict.
3. **Global projection:** It is imperative to develop a coherent global vision to manage relations with major players on the world stage and avoid succumbing to pressure in trade negotiations.

The debate highlighted the importance of continuing the EU enlargement process and condemned the paralysis caused by the reliance on **unanimity** in decision making, which undermines the EU's role as a unified global voice. Members also stressed the crucial role of civil society in defending democracy against both 'radical nationalism' and the unchecked anti-democratic power of major **AI platforms and digital companies**.

Brussels event highlights water as cornerstone of global security



On 5 November, the EESC's REX section, together with the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), the International Centre for Water Cooperation (ICWC) and UNIDO, hosted a follow-up event on [Blue Diplomacy and Water Cooperation \(REX/597\)](#). The event was an opportunity to present the **Routledge Water Diplomacy Handbook** just published by SIWI. Statements by the representatives of the European Parliament, European Commission and UNIDO, as well as EESC rapporteur Milena Angelova formed a consensus: **water resilience must rank alongside climate** as an EU priority. According to REX member Ms Angelova, legally binding frameworks are long overdue and water resilience demands decarbonisation-level ambition, societal integration and robust funding. Alain Coheur from the CCMI pointed out that water must be treated as a critical common good and a top EU agenda item, mainstreamed across all sectors to ensure competitiveness, sustainability and social justice.

Expert and practitioner roundtables underscored that water is a **strategic asset** inextricably tied to security, migration and food stability. EU Special Envoy Tony Agotha said that external policies must integrate water, security and migration, while Lifeng Li, Director of the FAO Land and Water Division, described it as imperative to treat water as a strategic resource for **food security**, demanding action at all levels. It was also highlighted that, while seven of the top 10 countries for transboundary water cooperation are European, there are still significant gaps, primarily in climate adaptation and quantitative resource management. Most of our speakers asserted that the task now is clear: to export not just the European model, but the mindset — putting partnership over preaching. As one of the speakers noted, *'Ultimately, water is not only a resource to be managed — it is a connector between economies and societies.'*

Enlargement countries

EU-Serbia Joint Consultative Committee meets in Belgrade



Civil society representatives and institutional stakeholders from Serbia and the European Union met in Belgrade on 28 November for the 20th session of the EU-Serbia Joint Consultative Committee (JCC). Held in an increasingly tense political climate in Serbia, the meeting took stock of the country's progress toward **EU accession** and addressed mounting concerns over **democratic backsliding** and unresolved structural challenges.

During the morning session, panellists and experts drew attention to the increasing **polarisation** of Serbian society. The JCC closed the meeting by adopting a [Joint Declaration](#), stressing that Serbia's EU

prospects remain firmly dependent on substantial **reforms** in governance, human rights, media freedom, the judiciary, electoral processes and social standards. The declaration underscores that such reforms must produce tangible results rather than serve as rhetorical commitments. The meeting reaffirmed that **youth engagement** and **civic participation** are central to Serbia's democratic renewal and European integration.

Albania: hopes for EU accession by 2030



The second meeting of the [EU-Albania Joint Consultative Committee](#) took place on 21 November at the EESC in Brussels. The JCC welcomed the significant progress made by Albania in its EU accession negotiations, and expressed the hope that the country will meet its ambition of closing all negotiation chapters by the end of 2027 and attaining **EU membership by 2030**. As an essential step, Albania should now, without delay, address the interim benchmarks set for the fundamentals cluster and secure a positive **Interim Benchmark Assessment Report**.

The JCC called on the Albanian authorities to guarantee that social partners and civil society organisations will be actively and meaningfully involved both in the accession process and in monitoring the reform agenda. Their involvement is vital for strengthening the implementation, coordination and scrutiny of **reforms** needed to deliver tangible and lasting benefits for Albanian society. [Read more.](#)

European Economic Area

Annual meeting of the EEA Consultative Committee

On 9 and 10 December, the **European Economic Area Consultative Committee** (EEA CC) held its 36th meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark. The EEA CC brings together social partners and civil society representatives from the 30 EEA countries. Its meeting was co-chaired by Juraj Sipko from the EESC and Thea Forsberg from the EFTA Consultative Committee. Participants discussed the **Arctic's geopolitical significance** and matters relating to **preparedness and defence**. On the latter point, they adopted a resolution and report on creating a European Single Market for Preparedness and Defence, drafted by co-rapporteurs Tomas Arvidsson (EESC) and Kim Sivertsen (EFTA CC). Mr Arvidsson said that the social partners and civil society, with their practical knowledge and understanding of the situation on the ground, play a crucial role in ensuring comprehensive civil and military preparedness at all levels and should therefore be regarded as key partners in these matters.

The meeting also covered **Denmark's priorities and accomplishments** in competitiveness and social policy during its **six-month Presidency of the Council of the EU**, the role of coordinated multi-employer collective bargaining and the Danish vocational education and training model. The visit to the consumer-owned cooperative Coop provided EEA CC members with practical insights into the VET system and initiatives designed to support those facing challenges when entering the labour market. The next meeting will take place on 26 and 27 May 2026 in Vaduz, Liechtenstein.



Africa

G20 Social Summit in South Africa



REX president **Stefano Palmieri** participated in the G20 Social Summit held in Johannesburg from 18 to 20 November. He also took part in several side events organised by the African Union's ECOSOCC. On 17 November, he delivered a speech at the opening session of ECOSOCC's flagship event, the [Pan-African Solidarity Forum](#) on **Harnessing Africa's G20 Strategy**.

Mr Palmieri was invited to address the Summit's closing ceremony, where he spoke alongside South African president **Cyril Ramaphosa** and Brazilian minister **Macaé Maria Evaristo dos Santos**. In his address, he spoke about the historic significance of hosting the G20 Social Summit on African soil and highlighted the need to embed civil society participation in global decision making. He called for the affirmation of solidarity, equality and sustainability, in line with the theme of the 2025 G20 meeting, and for stronger global public goods such as peace, health, human rights, labour rights and environmental protection. Mr Palmieri emphasised the urgency of **reforming global taxation** to finance these priorities, as well as investing in education, lifelong learning, wildlife protection and a just green and digital transition. He called for a reinvigorated multilateral system, **moving beyond GDP** as a measure of progress, and focusing on citizen well-being. He argued that the G20 should become a platform for people-to-people governance, where civil society has real access and influence. He also reaffirmed European civil society's commitment to working with African partners in the spirit of Ubuntu. The G20 Social Summit culminated in the presentation of a [Declaration](#), reflecting the shared priorities voiced by civil society throughout the event.

Launch of the Domestic Advisory Group on Kenya



The [Domestic Advisory Group](#) (DAG) established under the **EU–Kenya Economic Partnership Agreement** (EPA) held its inaugural meeting on 27 October at the EESC. This is the first time that an EU EPA with an African country has included the creation of a DAG to monitor and advise on the implementation of the agreement. During the meeting, the EU DAG elected Elena Crasta (ETUC, Group II) as chair. Representatives from DG Trade and the EU Delegation to Kenya provided updates on the implementation of the EPA and engaged in discussions with DAG members on priority issues. The group is focusing on identifying its key priorities for monitoring and advisory work, with a view to contributing to the EPA’s institutional meetings in 2026.

AU–EU Civil Society and Youth Forum in Angola



An EESC delegation took part in the AU–EU Civil Society and Youth Forum held on 20–21 November in Luanda, Angola. Co-organised by the European Commission, the EEAS, the African Union Commission and AU ECOSOCC, the Forum brought together more than 100 representatives from both regions to exchange views on key themes on the agenda of the AU–EU Leaders’ Summit: prosperity, people, multilateralism, peace and security. The EESC delegation comprised the REX section president, **Stefano Palmieri**, and the chair of the ACP–EU Follow-up Committee, **Milena Angelova**. Ms Angelova also took the floor during a side event organised by the OECD, which focused on recommendations for establishing a permanent, institutionalised stakeholder engagement mechanism for the AU–EU Partnership. The Forum’s discussions resulted in a raft of recommendations set out in a [Declaration](#) presented to political leaders at the [AU–EU Summit](#).

East Asia

Statement on Viet Nam

Following its 14th meeting on 6 November and the cancellation by the Vietnamese side of the



EU Domestic Advisory Group under the EU-Vietnam FTA

joint EU-Viet Nam meetings, planned to take place on 26–27 November in Brussels, the EU Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) for Viet Nam issued a [statement](#), expressing several **concerns**.

EU-Viet Nam relations began 35 years ago and the EU-Viet Nam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) entered into force five years ago. While **Viet Nam’s exports to the EU** have increased by over 70%, there has been **insufficient progress on human and labour rights**.

Viet Nam has yet to ratify key ILO conventions, and the new Trade Union Law is considered too restrictive. Civic space is limited, affecting consultations of civil society organisations. Despite ongoing cooperation, there are questions about the EU’s priorities due to **slow progress on social rights**. The EU DAG calls for improved stakeholder engagement and transparency,

addressing issues like social media restrictions, human rights violations and the need for cooperation on animal welfare.

EU-Korea Civil Society Forum



The 11th Civil Society Forum under the **EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement** took place at the EESC on 8-9 September, reinforcing its role as a joint platform for civil society dialogue. It brought together the EU Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) and a strong in-person turnout of Korea DAG representatives for labour and the environment.

The Forum focused on maintaining high standards and promoting sustainability through strong social dialogue. Key topics included labour rights, migrant worker inclusion, platform work and green initiatives such as the **Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation** and **just transition measures** for workers. Participants also discussed recent

legislative changes in Korea and shared hopes for stronger social dialogue following the country's presidential elections in June.

A **joint workshop** explored how digitalisation and AI are reshaping trade and labour, and was seen as a starting point for future collaboration on technology's impact on work. The meeting concluded with the presentation of **joint conclusions** to the Committee on Trade and Sustainable Development.

Latin America

EU-Andean DAG-to-DAG meeting and Civil Society Forum in Peru



The Domestic Advisory Groups of the EU and three Andean countries – Colombia, Peru and Ecuador – held their **11th Joint Meeting and Workshop** on 2-3 December in Lima. The discussions focused on future priorities for cooperation, the role of civil society in monitoring and advancing Trade and Sustainable Development commitments, and key thematic areas such as labour rights, environmental challenges and EU supply chain sustainability regulations.

The **workshop** addressed labour rights and Occupational Health and Safety issues in agricultural supply chains, environmental impacts and the implications of EU due-diligence legislation (EUDR, CSDDD, Forced Labour Regulation). The **Joint Meeting** covered democratic dialogue, institutional strengthening of DAGs, follow-up on labour and environmental concerns, the Single-Entry Point labour rights case, and EU investment and cooperation opportunities. **The DAGs adopted a [Joint Declaration](#)**. The

public session of the Trade and Sustainable Development Committee meeting – **Civil Society Forum** – was held on 4 December.

EU-CELAC Civil Society Forum in Colombia



A three-member EESC delegation took part in the EU-LAC Civil Society Forum, held in Santa Marta, Colombia on 7-8 November. The event, co-organised by the European Commission, the EU-LAC Foundation and Colombian civil society, brought together over 300 representatives from both regions to discuss democracy, social cohesion, climate justice and inclusive development ahead of the IV CELAC-EU Summit. The Forum featured **plenary and thematic sessions** on issues such as the enabling environment for civil society, sustainable financing and the *Global Gateway*, climate resilience, food systems, digital inclusion, organised crime, Indigenous governance, and gender equality through the *Bi-regional Pact for Care*.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of the **Santa Marta Declaration**, which calls for:

- **protection of civic space and defenders of democracy**, in line with the Escazú Agreement;
- prioritisation of **climate justice**, protection of the Amazon and equitable access to land and water;
- redefinition of development beyond GDP, with renewed **Official Development Assistance** commitments and binding social and environmental clauses in trade and investment, including *EU-Mercosur*;
- recognition of **care as a human right** and key to gender equality;
- rights-based **digital transformation** and stronger cooperation against corruption and organised crime;
- the creation of a **formal EU-LAC civil society follow-up mechanism** for dialogue and monitoring.

The EESC delegation highlighted the strong alignment between these priorities and the Committee's work on participatory democracy, social justice and inclusive governance. It reiterated the EESC's readiness to contribute to the proposed bi-regional mechanism and reinforce the role of organised civil society as a key actor in the EU-CELAC partnership.

EU and Brazil civil society in touch again

Last year, when the new Brazilian government reinstated **civil society representation at institutional level**, the EESC launched a renewed EU-Brazil Civil Society Round Table together with the re-established [Conselho de Desenvolvimento Econômico Social Sustentável \(CDESS\)](#). It was however decided to continue the numbering from the years before the previous administration abolished our counterpart.

So, the **9th EU-Brazil Civil Society Round Table** took place on 29-30 July 2025 in Brasília, marking the first formal meeting under the renewed framework and a milestone in bilateral relations. Co-chaired by then EESC president Oliver Röpke and CDESS executive secretary Olavo Noleto, the event was

attended by 24 members (12 from each side) and senior Brazilian officials, including two ministers: Gleisi Hoffmann and Márcio Macêdo. REX was represented by the outgoing president, Dimitris Dimitriadis and the president-designate, Stefano Palmieri, now in office.

Structured around four thematic panels – EU-Mercosur, COP30, digital transformation and democracy – the meeting fostered inclusive dialogue and joint conclusions. Key outcomes included the signing of Joint Rules of Procedure and the adoption of a [Joint Declaration](#) outlining shared positions on trade, climate, democracy and digitalisation. The meeting reaffirmed the strategic importance of EU-Brazil civil society cooperation and identified a clear roadmap for future collaboration.



North America

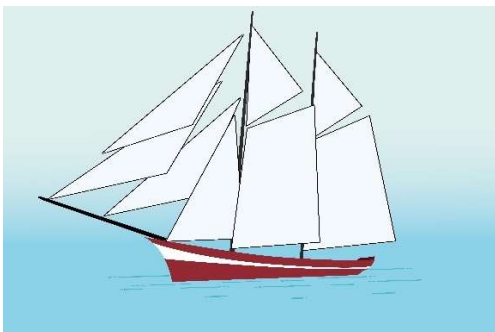
EU-CETA Domestic Advisory Group begins new term of office



The EU Domestic Advisory Group under the **Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)** held its first meeting of the new term of office on 4 December. During the meeting, the newly appointed members elected **Tanja Buzek** as chair, with **Eleonora Catella** and **Ben Vanpeperstraete** as vice-chairs.

The meeting enabled members to take stock of recent developments related to CETA, including the state of play of EU-Canada trade relations and key priorities for the years ahead. Discussions highlighted the **role of civil society** in promoting transparent, inclusive and sustainable trade policies, with particular attention to labour standards, environmental protection and responsible business conduct. Members exchanged views on expectations in terms of engagement with EU institutions and their Canadian counterparts, reaffirming the importance of a structured and meaningful dialogue between civil society and policymakers. In addition, the meeting helped identify priority areas for the **DAG's future work**, such as the implementation of the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) commitments under CETA, and set an ambitious agenda for a strong and engaged DAG.

A visit to the United States



The EESC visited the United States from 8 to 12 September. The EESC delegation visited Washington, D.C. and Chicago to gain a dual perspective: on the one hand, federal policies and their impacts; on the other, regional dynamics and the situation on the ground in the Midwest. The visit came at a politically and emotionally charged time, with the country strongly polarised along ideological, religious and identity lines. Discussions focused on the broader domestic context and its implications for US foreign policy, trade, digital regulation, transatlantic cooperation and the resilience of democratic

institutions. The EESC delegation met with a wide variety of actors, including the US State Department, the US Congress, the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), the John Hopkins DC Campus, the US Chamber of Commerce, the Atlantic Council, the National Endowment for Democracy, Global Trade Watch, the University of Chicago and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

New Zealand

EU civil society has started work on New Zealand



The **EU Domestic Advisory Group** set up under the EU-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and tasked with advising on the implementation of this agreement, held its first ever meeting at the EESC on 14 November. It was attended by representatives of **DG Trade** and the **EU Delegation in Wellington**, who reported back on the state of play of FTA implementation as well as on the initial activities of the counterpart DAG. On this point, a **presidency-level informal DAG-to-DAG meeting** will be organised by the end of the year, to lay the groundwork for work and joint activities – including the first joint

meetings – in 2026.

The EU DAG elected Ellen Nygren (EESC, Gr. II) as chair and Ksenija Simovic (COPA-COGECA, Gr. I) and Rudolph Kolbe (EESC, Gr. III) as vice-chairs. The group will now work on identifying **key priorities** for its monitoring and advisory activities, with a view to contributing to the next round of FTA-related institutional meetings in 2026.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Looking to the future of EU-UK relations



Despite Brexit, the EU and the UK continue to share a unique relationship rooted in common interests, values, perspectives and **strong civil society ties**. The EESC keeps playing its vital part via its EU-UK Follow-up Committee and its role in the Domestic Advisory Group.

As the EU and the UK are expected to start implementing the provisions of the 19 May agreement - while preparing for the 2026 review of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement – and ahead of the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly in November in London, **Tanja Buzek** (rapporteur and vice-chair

of the EU DAG), **Peter Byrne** (co-rapporteur) and **Jack O'Connor** (vice-chair of the EU-UK Follow-up Committee) visited Ireland to maximise the impact of the [EESC opinion on Looking to the future of EU-UK relations: 2026 Review of the Trade & Cooperation Agreement from a civil society perspective](#) (REX/600).

Among many relevant stakeholders, they met with representatives of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and a wide spectrum of civil society actors, including the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation, the British Irish Chamber of Commerce, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the Irish Environmental Network, the Irish Exporters Association, the Irish Farmers Association and the National Youth Council of Ireland. The opinion was also presented to **Simon Harris**, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence, and **Neale Richmond**, Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

EU-UK Youth Dialogue in Newcastle



Peter Byrne, the new chair of the EU-UK Follow-up Committee, participated in the Youth Dialogue co-organised by the EU Delegation to the UK and Newcastle University. The Youth Dialogue is a forum which facilitates a meaningful policy dialogue with young people in the UK and provides young people with a platform to express their views.

As space for civil society is shrinking with a resulting impact on young people and their organisations, Mr Byrne presented the EESC opinion on **EU-UK Youth Engagement** and the next priorities for the **EU-UK Follow-up Committee** and the **Youth Group**. He also highlighted the EESC's position on young people with a view to the forthcoming TCA review: achieving tangible improvements, removing barriers and incorporating the youth perspective.

The EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly in London



On 17 and 18 November, the EESC participated as an observer in the 6th EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA) in London. Members discussed topics central to the **EU-UK relationship**, such as the state of play of the Partnership Council, including progress since the May UK-EU Summit 2025; security and foreign policy cooperation to promote peace and stability, including the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) fund; creative and cultural exchange; and AI, data and digital cooperation.

The EESC delegation comprised **Séamus Boland**, EESC president, **Tanja Buzek**, REX section vice-president, and **Peter Byrne**, EU-UK Follow-up Committee chair. Mr Boland took the floor during the plenary session to stress the link between civil society and preparedness and the fact that the EESC wants to be involved in the fight for values. The EESC delegation also participated in the breakout sessions on the **Review of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement** and the 2026 UK-EU Summit, on climate and energy, and on trade, supply chains and workers' rights.

The next PPA meeting will take place in Brussels on 16 and 17 March 2026.

Trade

EESC discussed digital technologies and trade in Geneva



On 17-18 September, the World Trade Organization (WTO) held its annual Public Forum in Geneva, Switzerland. 4200 participants came from all over the world to discuss the theme of the forum, **Enhance, Create and Preserve**, focusing on how digital advancements are redefining standards within the international trading system and enhancing global connectivity, innovation and cooperation. In spite of the overlap with the last plenary session of the term, the EESC sent a delegation, including Juraj Sipko and Mira-Maria Danisman, the outgoing and incoming chairs of the International Trade Follow-up Committee.

The EESC delegation followed several panels and engaged in informal meetings with people of interest.

This mission provided important insights on a topic – **digital technologies for trade** – which is becoming exponentially more relevant and which will continue to be one of the priorities of the trade committee. It was also an opportunity to test the waters at the WTO in preparation for the Ministerial Conference 14 next year in **Cameroon**.

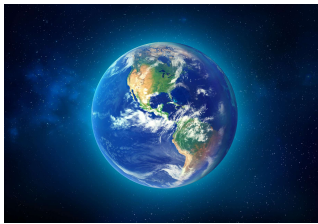
Opinions and information reports in the spotlight

[REX/610](#) - Safe countries package (adopted during the October plenary session)



The European Commission proposed a **list of safe countries** suitable for accelerated procedures when Member States review asylum applications from their citizens. The list, which includes **Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Kosovo¹, Morocco and Tunisia**, aims to implement the Pact on Migration and Asylum and create more uniform treatment of asylum applications across Member States. While welcoming the idea of standardising procedures to avoid excessive discretion on the part of individual countries, the EESC points out that the use of an accelerated procedure will entail a significant reduction in procedural safeguards. It is also alarming that in the case of a rejected asylum application, the applicant may be removed from the territory of the Member State pending a court appeal — a situation that is at odds with the **principle of non-refoulement** under Article 33 of the Geneva Convention. The Committee also considers that the designation of safe countries constitutes a restriction of the **right to asylum**, both due to procedural safeguards being diminished by the use of the accelerated procedure and because the presumption that the country is safe results in a reversal of the burden of proof onto the asylum seeker, who must prove the contrary in order to be granted international protection.

[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 (adopted during the September plenary session)



The EESC highlights the growing hybrid threats to Eastern European democracy, particularly through **disinformation campaigns** powered by **AI algorithms** and **social media platforms**. These systems put engagement above accuracy, sidelining independent journalism and local voices while enabling **foreign manipulation and interference**, primarily from Russia and, increasingly, China. They exploit societal divisions, target vulnerable groups with tailored narratives in local languages and are paramount on platforms outside EU oversight, such as Telegram and VKontakte, creating regulatory blind spots. Using Belarus as a case study, the Committee highlights the unique vulnerability of **Central and Eastern Europe**, where dissent is marginalised and propaganda is reinforced by state repression, algorithmic biases favouring Russian content and platform inaction. While welcoming EU instruments such as the Digital Services Act, AI Act and European Media Freedom Act, the EESC highlights persistent gaps in enforcement and narrative biases in AI training. Therefore, the Committee calls for **comprehensive measures**, including mandatory algorithmic disclosures and audits, funding for independent media in **Central and Eastern Europe**, enhanced detection of foreign manipulation, integration of digital literacy in education and antitrust actions to rebalance digital advertising markets for greater media pluralism and democratic resilience.

Ongoing opinions and information reports

[REX/613](#) - The role of the private sector and civil society in strengthening economic cooperation within the Pact for the Mediterranean

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244(1999) and the International Court of Justice opinion on Kosovo's declaration of independence.

Opinions adopted during the plenary session of 3-4 December

[REX/611](#) - Global Europe (Multiannual Financial Framework proposal)

As part of its **MFF 2028–2034 package**, the European Commission has presented its proposal for **Global Europe**, the EU's main financial instrument for external action. The proposal aims to enhance the EU's capacity to respond to global challenges and strengthen its position on the world stage by advancing mutual interests with partner countries, accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, supporting enlargement, neighbourhood policy, international partnerships and humanitarian aid, and reinforcing Ukraine's recovery.

The EESC welcomes the Commission proposal to **increase expenditure on the EU's external policies**, and considers that this increase is essential for the EU to affirm both its role as a **global player** and its **values**, and to build **strategic autonomy**. The EU should play a leading role in development and humanitarian efforts and in revitalising the UN system, with the **Global Gateway** as its main instrument. However, the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities Advisory Board for the Global Gateway has remained disconnected from decision making and created fragmented dialogue, so it is now important to ensure meaningful participation, including of the EESC and the CoR. The Committee expects that the objectives on economic cooperation and entrepreneurship will be accompanied by ambitious social, human rights and environmental safeguards, and opposes the approach of suspending payments in the context of **migration policy**, emphasising the need for positive incentives to achieve the stated goals.

[REX/609](#) - The European Union's strategic approach to the Black Sea region

[REX/608](#) - A predictable and common European way forward for Ukrainians in the EU

An afterword and a farewell

Dear reader,



The REX section launched its Newsletter in December 2021 and has since published three issues a year. As we approach the end of 2025, we have now reached issue number 13. This is not quite a round number, so it may seem strange that the editor is stepping out of the shadows to look back on the journey we have taken. Why not at 10, 12 or 15?

The fact is that I am about to leave the REX section and so must hand over the reins. I wanted to thank you for following the [previous 12 issues](#): it has been extremely interesting for me to receive articles from colleagues, summarise them, lay them out, choose accompanying images, formulate headlines, write

various pieces and finally deliver the finished product to my colleague Elisabete Dias, who formatted it for email delivery and online publication.

I hope that you have found it interesting to read the fruit of this collective effort, in which we have all worked hard to provide an overview of the many activities carried out by our section and our unit with a view to ensuring that European civil society can effectively engage with civil society from third countries.

We started out with high expectations of the Green Deal, only to face a rude awakening in the shape of Putin's criminal war against Ukraine, followed by the endless tragedy of Palestine and the disheartening change of direction of the new American administration, while disinformation and propaganda against Europe seek to corner our institutions and values.

Against this background, it has been very encouraging for me to see our members discussing and expressing their firm pro-European convictions. The European Union is fundamental to our future, and together - institutions, citizens and society - we will succeed.

I am now sailing towards new professional shores, but I will not forget this exciting finale to my career as a European civil servant, in a fantastic unit made up of outstanding professionals and people.

My heartfelt thanks to you all.

Daniele Vitali
REX Newsletter editor

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