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EDITORIAL BY STEFANO PALMIERI



A WAR WITHOUT BORDERS: HOW THE IRAN CONFLICT IS RESHAPING THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

The unfolding conflict in Iran may look like another regional crisis in an already volatile part of the world. It is not. It is a systemic shock to the global economy.

In today's hyperconnected world, the idea of a "local war" no longer holds. Supply chains, energy systems and financial markets are so tightly interwoven that disruption in one strategic corridor is felt everywhere—almost instantly. We are already seeing the consequences, from rising fuel prices in Europe to growing food insecurity in developing economies.

[Read the editorial](#)

REX-PLAINED



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Beyond its core EESC activities, REX operates a network of over 30 bodies and a wide range of mechanisms that connect the European Union with partners worldwide and contribute in enabling civil society voices to actively shape EU's external policy

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT



EESC HOSTS EUROPE'S CHAMPIONS OF GROWTH

The European Economic and Social Committee hosted the inaugural [Future 500 - Champions of Growth conference](#), bringing together a wide range of European policymakers, investors, and business leaders to discuss the future of Europe's economy. The event was organised in cooperation with the Atlantic Council, IEDC - Bled School of Management, and Bosqar Invest, with active support from REX. It gathered a diverse group of participants, including European Commissioners Marta Kos and Maria Luís Albuquerque, ministers such as Nataša Mikuš Žigman and Petrit Malaj, as well as former German Vice-Chancellor Philipp Rösler and former Portuguese Minister Maria João Rodrigues.

Senior EU officials and institutional representatives also took part, including Kerstin Jorna, Michiel Scheffer, and Siegfried Mureşan. The conference further brought together representatives from key financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank, European Investment Fund, Euronext, Nasdaq, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, alongside venture capital funds and fast-growing European companies. Such a wide range of participants created an opportunity for direct exchanges between high-level policymakers, investors, and entrepreneurs. Discussions, in a packed room, focused on a key challenge for Europe: how to support the growth of globally competitive companies while ensuring they remain rooted in Europe.

A notable aspect of the conference was its practical and open tone. Participants moved beyond general observations to reflect on the structural conditions needed to strengthen Europe's competitiveness in the years ahead.

The EESC was represented by Ionuț Sibian, Vice-President of the External Relations Section.

 [Photo gallery](#)  [Video recording](#)

ENLARGEMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD



EESC PLENARY HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPACT OF WAR ON UKRAINIAN YOUTH

On 24 February 2026, four years had passed since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For many Ukrainians the reality of war remains part of everyday life. This winter, thousands of families, including young people, have faced freezing temperatures without reliable heating or electricity, while continuing to live under the threat of ongoing attacks. Against this backdrop, the EESC dedicated its Plenary session on 18 February to the situation of Ukrainian youth, focusing on both the

immediate impact of the war and the longer-term prospects for recovery. The debate opened with a message from Olena Zelenska, who called for sustained international support. Her message was reinforced by personal testimonies from Yaryna, a Ukrainian student, and Olha, a teacher, both currently living in Belgium. Their stories brought a human dimension to the discussion, illustrating the challenges of displacement, education disruption, and adapting to life far from home.

The session highlighted the scale of the impact on young people. According to UNICEF, around three quarters of children in Ukraine feel unsafe, more than half report persistent sadness, and approximately 43% experience serious psychological distress, including anxiety and difficulty concentrating. Beyond these figures, the testimonies shared during the Plenary underscored the lived reality behind the statistics. Participants discussed how Europe can continue to support Ukraine's younger generation, not only in addressing urgent needs, but also in creating conditions for long-term recovery, education, and stability. Stefano Palmieri, President of REX, reaffirmed Europe's commitment to Ukraine. He noted that the EU has stood alongside Ukraine since the beginning of the war and highlighted ongoing initiatives aimed at providing support. *"As President of the REX Section, my foremost wish is for a just peace to be achieved as soon as possible"* he said. *"Today's debate reminds us that the consequences of this war are deeply human."*



HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE IN SKOPJE FOCUSES ON EU ACCESSION AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The EESC's Western Balkans Follow-up Committee held a high-level conference in Skopje, bringing together representatives of civil society, trade unions, employers, and public authorities from North Macedonia to discuss key priorities in the EU accession process.

The discussions focused on the role of organised civil society and social partners in supporting reforms, strengthening social dialogue, and promoting inclusive and democratic governance. Participants emphasised that meaningful engagement of these actors is essential for building a credible and sustainable path towards EU membership. The conference also addressed broader challenges linked to democratic resilience. Exchanges covered the importance of safeguarding civic space, protecting freedom of expression, and countering disinformation—issues seen as central to maintaining trust in institutions and ensuring the integrity of the accession process.

Alongside the conference, the presidency of the Western Balkans Follow-up Committee held bilateral meetings with national authorities to discuss recommendations put forward by organised civil society.

In the same week, the EESC's Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law (FRRL) group carried out a country visit to North Macedonia. The findings of this visit will be reflected

in a forthcoming report.

Read more [Conference with social partners and civil society organisations from North Macedonia](#)



EU-SERBIA JCC REVEALS PROFOUND REFORM CHALLENGES AND POLITICAL TENSIONS

The EU–Serbia Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) held its 21st meeting in Brussels on 30 March 2026, against a backdrop of increasing political tensions and deepening polarisation in Serbia.

The discussions gathering representatives from the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Serbian government, the Serbian judiciary and civil society, took place shortly after local elections and following more than a year of social unrest and protests, creating a particularly sensitive political context. Within this environment, the meeting provided an opportunity to assess Serbia’s progress towards European Union accession, while also addressing growing concerns about democratic standards and reform efforts.

The adopted declaration pointed to the need for renewed momentum in key reform areas. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening the rule of law, improving electoral conditions, safeguarding judicial independence, ensuring media freedom, and reinforcing efforts to combat corruption.

The meeting attracted significant attention from Serbian media and civil society. In its aftermath, several senior political representatives in Serbia publicly criticised the declaration and targeted individual JCC members on social media, reflecting the broader tensions surrounding the country’s reform process and public debate.

Read the [Joint declaration EU-Serbia JCC](#)



HEARING: CIVIL SOCIETY AT THE HEART OF EU REFORM SUPPORT

On 30 January, the EESC held a dedicated hearing as part of the first study group meeting for opinion REX/612, requested by the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU. The hearing brought together a broad range of stakeholders, including representatives of civil society organisations, social partners and experts from Brussels as well as from the Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine. Discussions focused on the role of organised civil society in supporting reforms under the EU Growth Plans and in ensuring that enlargement related reforms are inclusive, participatory and socially sustainable. The exchanges provided valuable input for the ongoing drafting of the opinion, helping to strengthen its policy relevance and reflect perspectives from both EU level actors and partners in enlargement countries.

Read more: [Civil Society's Role in Supporting Reform under the Growth Plans for the Western Balkans and Moldova, as well as in Ukraine's Reform Path](#)



SUPPORTING EU ENLARGEMENT: EESC LAUNCHES NEW PHASE OF ECM PROJECT

In 2026, the EESC is launching the second phase of its ground-breaking project on Enlargement Candidate Members (ECMs). This new phase further strengthens the project through the involvement of a larger number of civil society experts, an increased contribution to EESC opinions, and enhanced support for the EU enlargement process. The continuation of the project is made possible thanks to the support of the European Commission, with funding secured until the end of 2027 to ensure its implementation.

Kosovo* is now also included in the ECM project. A pool of 15 individual ECMs, representing the three Groups (Employers, Trade Unions and Civil Society Organisations), will contribute to the drafting of selected EESC opinions.

Read more [Enlargement Candidate Members' Initiative](#)

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

GLOBAL RELATIONS & STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



EESC ADDRESSES THE EU-UK PARLIAMENTARY PARTNERSHIP ASSEMBLY

On 16 & 17 March, the EESC participated again as an observer in the 7th EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA) in Brussels. In today's geopolitical and geo-economic context, members discussed topics central to the EU-UK relationship, including the state of play within the Partnership Council, economic security to foster growth and resilience in EU-UK trade, the local and regional dimension of EU-UK relations, as well as security and defence cooperation between the two sides of the Channel.

The EESC delegation was composed of Séamus Boland, EESC President, Tanja Buzek, REX Section Vice-President & Vice-Chair of the EU DAG, and Peter Byrne, Chair of the EU-UK Follow-up Committee. The EESC President addressed the plenary, underlining that the EU-UK partnership is strategically important to strengthen global economic resilience, while supporting growth, stability, competitiveness and opportunities for business, workers and citizens on both sides. Besides, the EESC delegation participated in the breakout sessions on digital cooperation, research and innovation, and mobility and youth opportunities. The next PPA meeting will take place in London, on 16 and 17 November 2026.



10TH EU-BRAZIL CIVIL SOCIETY ROUND TABLE: ADVANCING DEMOCRACY, INCLUSION, AND SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP

On 25–26 February 2026, representatives from the European Economic and Social Committee and Brazil's Sustainable Economic and Social Development Council of Brazil (CDESS) met for the 10th EU–Brazil Civil Society Round Table. The gathering brought together voices from across civil society to strengthen cooperation between the two regions.

Participants reaffirmed their commitment to democracy, human rights, and sustainable development. The discussions highlighted the importance of multilateral cooperation in tackling global challenges—from economic inequality to climate change.

A key message from the meeting was clear: democracy works best when citizens are actively involved.

Delegates stressed the need to combat disinformation, improve media literacy, and ensure inclusive participation. Civil society organisations were recognised as essential partners in shaping and monitoring public policy.

The Round Table welcomed progress on the EU–Mercosur Partnership Agreement, noting its potential to boost cooperation and economic growth. At the same time, participants underlined the need for strong

oversight to ensure the benefits are shared fairly, especially among vulnerable communities.

Digital transformation and artificial intelligence were central topics. Delegates called for policies that protect workers' rights while supporting skills development, entrepreneurship, and youth well-being. Social dialogue and collective bargaining were seen as crucial tools to manage change.

With COP30 on the horizon, both sides pushed for stronger climate cooperation. They welcomed efforts toward a "just transition," ensuring climate policies support workers and communities most affected by environmental change.

The meeting concluded with a Joint Declaration setting out a roadmap for continued cooperation. The message was simple but powerful: meaningful progress depends on inclusive dialogue, social justice, and active civil society engagement. On 25-26 February 2026, the 10th EU-Brazil Civil Society Round Table brought together 26 delegates from the EESC and the Sustainable Economic and Social Development Council of Brazil (CDESS), representing a diverse range of civil society organisations. The event reaffirmed both regions' commitment to a robust Strategic Partnership, anchored in democracy, multilateralism, human rights, sustainable development, and climate action.

Read the [Joint Declaration](#)



EU-LATIN AMERICA PARTNERSHIP AND THE GRAN CHACO IN FOCUS AT LAFC MEETING

On 24 February 2026, the EESC's Latin America Follow-up Committee (Lafc) convened for its first meeting of the year, bringing together members, EU officials, and Latin American partners for a day of strategic dialogue. The morning session focused on the evolving EU-Latin America partnership, with updates on political, economic, and social developments across the region, and a strong emphasis on the role of civil society in defending democracy and human rights. The afternoon was dedicated to a public event: "Focus on the Gran Chaco", organised in collaboration with the multi-actor platform Redes Chaco. The dialogue explored key themes linking the Gran Chaco Americano to the EU-Latin America agenda, including the EU-Mercosur Agreement, responsible sourcing for the green transition, and climate-induced migration. Distinguished speakers included policymakers, civil society leaders, and experts from both regions. Participants also enjoyed two special side activities: a photo exposition on the Gran Chaco region and the immersive "Gran Chaco Americano 360°" virtual exhibition, offering a unique opportunity to experience the landscapes and cultures of the region through VR technology.

The event highlighted the EESC's commitment to fostering inclusive, forward-looking partnerships and supporting sustainable development in Latin America.



REINVIGORATING TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE

The latest meeting of the Transatlantic Relations Follow-up Committee (TRFC), held on 12 March 2026 in Brussels, offered a timely and forward-looking discussion on the future of EU relations with the United States and Canada, placing civil society firmly at the heart of the transatlantic partnership.

A central focus of the meeting was the proposed Transatlantic Civil Society Platform, an initiative aimed at strengthening dialogue across the Atlantic. Members expressed the growing need for structured engagement between European, American, and Canadian civil society actors, particularly in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape. Participants emphasized that such a platform should be inclusive, well-funded, and strategically aligned, with a particular role for youth engagement and improved communication efforts.

The geopolitical dimension of transatlantic relations was also front and centre. The depth of EU-Canada cooperation across areas such as trade, climate policy, and security was emphasised, while noting that civil society ties could still be further developed. Meanwhile, Kristina Kausch from the German Marshall Fund pointed to broader structural shifts affecting EU-US relations, including increasing geopolitical competition and internal democratic challenges.

On the economic front, discussions reflected a more cautious outlook. Varg Folkman from the EPC highlighted rising uncertainty in EU-US trade relations, particularly in light of recent US tariff developments. At the same time, the European Commission's DG TRADE reaffirmed the resilience of the transatlantic economic partnership, while stressing the EU's commitment to regulatory autonomy.

Despite emerging tensions, a clear message resonated throughout the meeting: the transatlantic partnership remains indispensable. Members reiterated the importance of defending democratic values and the rules-based international order, while adapting cooperation to new global realities.

As the TRFC continues its work, its ambition is to transform dialogue into concrete action and ensure that civil society plays a stronger role in shaping the future of transatlantic relations.



CELEBRATING INDIAN CULTURE AND STRENGTHENING EU-INDIA RELATIONS

The EESC, in cooperation with the Embassy of India, hosted an Indian cultural evening on 3 February 2026 in the context of the EU-India Summit. The event brought together EESC members and staff, Ambassadors from South Asia and ASEAN countries, and representatives of EU Permanent Representations. Following the welcome remarks, participants enjoyed a classical Indian dance performance, a networking reception featuring traditional chai and Indian cuisine, and a screening of the film *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*.

The evening showcased the richness and diversity of Indian culture while marking an important milestone in EU-India relations, notably the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement. This Agreement represents a historic step towards strengthening bilateral ties and advancing sustainable trade and cooperation. More broadly, the event reflected an increasingly ambitious strategic partnership, grounded in shared values and a common commitment to a rules-based international order.

TRADE & DOMESTIC ADVISORY GROUPS



EESC JOINS EU DELEGATION TO THE WTO 14TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN CAMEROON

Between 26 and 29 March 2026, EESC members joined the EU delegation at the 14th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Yaoundé.

The delegation was composed of seven members, including REX President Stefano Palmieri, SOC President Cinzia Del Rio, and Mira-Maria Danisman, chair of the International Trade Committee.

The delegation attended the daily debriefings for civil society hosted by DG Trade, and had informal meetings with the African Union ECOSOCC, the WTO, the French business association AFEP and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). A short impromptu meeting was also organized with MEP Warborn (INTA).

While the EESC's participation was a success - despite the reduced access compared to the 13th Conference in Abu Dhabi - the same unfortunately cannot be said for the outcome of the event.

The Members States did not achieve even the minimal goal of a common declaration on the WTO reform to pave the way for further work towards MC15 in 2028. The same can be said of the moratorium on e-commerce duties, which was left to expire for the first time since its introduction in 1998.

As declared by the WTO Director General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the members ran out of time and could

not agree on the draft texts they had been working on. Now, the intention is to finalise negotiations in Geneva over the next few weeks. The EESC delegation agrees with the assessment of the EU Mission to the WTO: it is a disappointing outcome, and a setback for multilateralism and the WTO system.

While the EU should not and will not give up on the WTO, the priority remains to strengthen and expand our network of friends and partners, pursuing plurilateral solutions wherever possible. The EESC's International Trade Committee will keep monitoring the developments on all open fronts on behalf of the REX section.



DAGS REPORT TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S INTA COMMITTEE

EU Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) presented their work to the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade (INTA), underlining their key role in monitoring current and future EU trade agreements. DAG representatives highlighted their work in ensuring that trade agreements deliver tangible benefits for society, while closely monitoring labour and environmental standards, global supply chains, and sustainability commitments. They also reported on their role in following complaints submitted through the Single Entry Point (SEP) mechanism and assessing the impact of EU legislation on trade partners and stakeholders. The exchange confirmed the important role of civil society in ensuring that EU trade policy remains fair, sustainable and transparent, and that trade agreements deliver real benefits for workers, businesses and society as a whole.



EU-JAPAN PARTNERSHIP ADVANCES DIALOGUE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TRADE

The EU Domestic Advisory Group (EU DAG) for Japan travelled to Tokyo in March to participate in the Joint Dialogue with civil society on 4 March. Ahead of the meeting, the EU DAG received a comprehensive debriefing from the EU Delegation in Tokyo on recent policy developments in Japan and the state of EU-Japan relations. In addition, it held productive meetings with the Director of the Centre for Industrial Cooperation and representatives of the ILO Office in Japan, further deepening its understanding of key economic and labour policy developments.

The Joint Dialogue with civil society centred on key pillars of trade and sustainable development, notably climate action, labour standards, and responsible business conduct. Participants discussed the green transition — including Japan's emission trading system GX-ETS, CBAM, carbon neutrality, and the EU-Japan Green Alliance — as well as sustainable forest

management and deforestation-free supply chains. Exchanges on trade and labour addressed the implementation of ILO core conventions and recent developments related to forced labour. Finally, discussions covered responsible business conduct, due diligence requirements (including CSDDD implementation), and the need to strengthen capacity and cooperation in global supply chains.

Read the EU DAG statement here: [EU DAG STATEMENT, TOKYO, 4 MARCH 2026](#)



CONCERNS ON LABOUR, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENTS UNDER EU-VIETNAM FTA

The joint meetings under the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), postponed from 2025, took place in January 2026 in Brussels. Discussions included a workshop on the EU Deforestation Regulation and its impact on SMEs and farmers, and a meeting between the EU and the Viet Nam Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) covering labour rights, sustainability, and trade issues under the EVFTA. Key topics included Viet Nam's ratification and implementation of International Labour Organization conventions, particularly Convention No. 87, concerns over the Viet Nam's new Trade Union Law, and ongoing complaints via the EU Commission's Single Entry Point. Broader discussions addressed sustainable textiles, aquaculture, child labour, the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, and animal welfare, including Viet Nam's EU "yellow card" for illegal fishing.

Only a short joint statement was issued due to civil society concerns, prompting a unilateral EU DAG statement highlighting persistent human rights, labour, and environmental violations, and limited progress under the Trade and Sustainable Development chapter. Despite challenges, positive developments included expanded Vietnamese DAG participation and open dialogue, laying groundwork for future cooperation in areas like fisheries, women's empowerment, and labour standards.

Overall, the EU DAG expressed serious concern about insufficient progress on sustainability commitments despite deepening trade relations, stressing the importance of continued engagement and regular in-person meetings.



EU DAG SETS PRIORITIES FOR MONITORING THE EU-NEW ZEALAND FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

The EU Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) set up under the EU-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and tasked with advising on its implementation held its second meeting at EESC premises, on 28 January 2026.

The meeting saw the participation of representatives from both DG Trade and the EU Delegation in Wellington, reporting on the FTA implementation status as well as on the activities of the counterpart DAG. The Ambassador of New Zealand to the EU, Mr. Simon Draper, shared his remarks on the bilateral relationship and stressed the importance of a structured, meaningful stakeholder engagement. The group discussed and identified a set of key priorities for its monitoring and advisory activities, both for 2026 and for the rest of the mandate. Some members will now work on those priorities and produce documents to be shared with DG TRADE and the counterpart DAG before the next round of FTA-related institutional meetings in 2026.



EU DAG SETS PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF EU-UK RELATIONS

The EU Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) set up under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and tasked with advising on its implementation held its first meeting of the new mandate at EESC premises, on 16 January 2026.

The EU DAG elected Mr. Daniel Pérez Vega (Eurogroup for Animals, Gr. III) as chair, and Ms. Tanja Buzek (EESC, Gr. II) and Mr. Luisa Santos (BusinessEurope, Gr. I) as vice-chairs. Members reflected on the work of the previous mandate; they also called for a more ambitious engagement with the Commission, whose representatives presented an overview of the implementation of the TCA and perspectives for 2026. DG TRADE underlined that the TCA remains the cornerstone of EU-UK relations and is overall functioning smoothly, with a limited number of trade irritants. DAG members stressed the need for greater transparency and clearer guidance for economic operators, as well as continued vigilance regarding non-regression of labour rights. They demanded to be meaningfully involved in discussions affecting the functioning and future orientation of the Agreement. The DAG held an internal discussion among on priorities for the new mandate: strengthening cooperation with the UK DAG, pursuing a constructive but demanding dialogue with the Commission, and ensuring that civil society concerns remain central in the evolving EU-UK relationship.



EU-CHILE DCG ESTABLISHED AND SETS PRIORITIES FOR NEW MANDATE

The youngest EU DAG, the EU-Chile Domestic Consultative Group (DCG), held its inaugural meeting on 20 March 2026. The Group established its new structure and elected Antonio García del Riego (EESC, Group I) as Chair for the 2025-2028 mandate. The meeting featured a meaningful exchange with representatives from the European External Action Service (EEAS) and DG Trade on the Group's role and mandate under the new Advanced Framework Agreement. The EU-Chile DCG also discussed priorities for its new mandate, pending the formal establishment of the Chilean DCG.



EU-CENTRAL AMERICA DAG HOLDS 30TH MEETING AND PREPARES JOINT EVENTS

The EU-Central America DAG convened for its 30th meeting on 23 March 2026, chaired by Edmé Domínguez. The agenda included briefings on the implementation of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation parts of the Association Agreement, exchanges with the representatives from the EEAS, DG INTPA and DG Trade on the implementation of recommendations from the latest Joint Declaration of the EU-CA DAGs. The Group also prepared for the upcoming Joint Events with Central American counterparts from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama, scheduled for 15-17 June 2026 in Brussels.

REX SECTION HIGHLIGHTS



TRADE UNIONS IN BELARUS: BETWEEN REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

On 23 February, the European Economic and Social Committee's REX Section held a debate on the deteriorating state of trade union freedoms in Belarus, bringing renewed attention to a situation marked by both sustained repression and continued resistance. The discussion gathered representatives from EU institutions and international organisations, including Michał Kobosko, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Belarus, Lelio Bentes Corrêa, and Aliaksandr Yarashuk, Chairman of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions. Recently released from detention and deported to the EU without his documents, Yarashuk provided a first-hand account of the situation.

Despite ongoing international pressure and the appointment of a Special Envoy by the International Labour Organization in June 2025, Belarusian authorities continue to reject dialogue on compliance

with fundamental labour standards. According to Yarashuk, repression has intensified, with authorities systematically dismantling independent trade union structures through arrests and prison sentences. Beyond detentions, participants highlighted emerging forms of pressure, including actions targeting the families of activists, such as the removal of children. These developments reflect a broader pattern: repression in Belarus has persisted for over two decades, alongside the government's continued failure to implement recommendations issued by the ILO Commission of Inquiry—leading to the application of Article 33, one of the organisation's most serious measures.

The debate also recalled the wider political context. In August 2026, six years will have passed since the mass protests that followed the disputed presidential elections, widely seen as a turning point in the country's recent history. Since then, the EESC has stepped up its engagement with Belarusian civil society and independent journalists, including through a 2025 Memorandum of Understanding with Belarusian democratic forces.



SPEECH BY STEFANO PALMIERI, PRESIDENT OF THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS SECTION

REX SECTION MEETING, 15 JANUARY 2026

The year began with Operation Absolute Resolve on 3 January, when US military forces attacked military bases in Venezuela, seizing the president, Nicolas Maduro, and his wife, Cilia Flores. It is clear to me that the Maduro government is illegitimate and has over the years taken on the characteristics of a dictatorship that is corrupt and violent towards its own citizens. While being quite clear about that, it cannot be denied that the US operation is unacceptable and contrary to international law and the UN Charter itself.

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