

OVERVIEW OF THE EESC OPINIONS ON THE MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

A Strategic Vision
for Europe's Future



European Economic
and Social Committee

A word from Elena Calistru, President of the Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, EESC

The Commission has proposed allocating close to €2 trillion for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034, alongside a redesigned budget structure and revised arrangements for deciding how a large share of this funding is allocated. The EESC opinions brought together in this publication are organised civil society's reading of both the funding and the framework – and the Committee considers the latter to be as important as the former.

Two principles underpin the Commission's proposal: **flexibility and simplification**. They are easy to welcome and difficult to oppose, which makes them all the more important to scrutinise closely. Flexibility is a real asset when a budget faces an unforeseen crisis; it becomes problematic when it excludes those best placed to assess how funds are actually used. Simplification that quietly removes partners, checks and regional detail risks creating a budget that is easier to misuse without detection.

On **volume**, the Committee is unequivocal. A nominal increase that barely keeps pace with inflation effectively expects the Union to do more with less and calls it ambition. A future oriented EU budget is not sustainable without a serious conversation on own resources, as the revenue side of the budget can no longer remain secondary to expenditure.

It is, however, the **architecture** of the next multiannual budget that raises the most significant concerns. Combining cohesion, agriculture, fisheries, migration and security within a single framework risks placing distinct policy areas in competition for the same financial envelope. It also shifts decisions from the regional level – where the realities of a depopulating border area or a remote island are visible – to the national level, where those places are more easily levelled out. A budget designed primarily from the perspective of national capitals struggles to take account of its own periphery, yet it is precisely in those areas where EU funding demonstrates its effectiveness.

This is why the importance of **partnership** is highlighted in nearly all the EESC opinions included here, and why it should not be read as a courtesy. The involvement of social partners and civil society organisations in monitoring committees enables the Union to determine at an early stage whether a programme is delivering – well before the final evaluation does so, in a too expensive manner and when it is already too late. The Committee calls for this role to be strengthened: full involvement across programming and monitoring, safeguards where national governments decline to engage, and standalone instruments – the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Just Transition Fund – that are sufficiently predictable to allow partners to plan around. AgoraEU is a particularly clear example: it supports civil society organisations and the civic and media space in which they operate, ensuring they remain adequately resourced and independent enough to function. Its funding should be maintained: without it, the budget risks losing the people who keep its implementation transparent.

A brief word on the European Economic and Social Committee itself. Bringing together a common position from employers, trade unions and civil society is central to its role. The value of the compilation of policy proposals that follows lies in offering negotiators a **coherent perspective from those who will be directly affected** by whatever framework is agreed, long after the trilogues have concluded.

Negotiations on the file are ongoing between the Council and the Parliament, with time running short. At the same time, tensions persist between the so-called 'frugal' Member States and the 'Friends of Cohesion', adding a further layer of complexity to the discussions. The easiest budget to agree upon is often one that remains opaque to those outside the room; however, the views gathered here argue for a more ambitious and transparent approach – one that keeps the process open. In this context, the EESC is actively trying to contribute to an outcome that serves the interests of European citizens.

List of EESC opinions on European Commission's MFF Proposals

Links in the titles

Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034

Own resources – 2025 proposal

Global Europe (Multiannual Financial Framework proposal)

EU Fund for cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security

Establishing the European Fund for Regional Development including for European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg) and the Cohesion Fund

AgoraEU and Justice programmes

Proposal for a regulation on Erasmus+

Establishing the European Social Fund as part of the National and Regional Partnership Plan

Union support for Asylum, Migration and Integration; Internal Security; and Integrated Border Management and Visa Policy

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2027

Revision of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism

Revision of the Common market Organisation (CMO) Regulation

Revision of the Common Fisheries Policy

Competitiveness fund

Horizon Europe

Single Market and Customs Programme 2028–2034

Connecting Europe Facility – 2028–2034

EU Budget expenditure tracking and performance framework

MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK 2028-2034

COM(2025) 570 final

| ECO/682

| EESC Rapporteurs: Dominika BIEGON, Konstantinos DIAMANTOUROS, Luca JAHIER

22/01/2026

The EESC:

- warns that the Commission's proposed marginal increase in the volume of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is inadequate and stresses the need for a substantial increase in real resources;
- welcomes the Commission's proposal for new EU own resources but calls for greater ambition to ensure a more effective budget, stressing that revenues should be linked to EU policies;
- strongly opposes the proposed reduction of cohesion policy and common agricultural policy (CAP) funding in the next MFF;
- also opposes the plan to merge resources for cohesion policy, ESF+, CAP, fisheries, migration and security into a single fund;
- stresses that all stakeholders must be effectively involved at every level of decision-making on the allocation of resources, strategic priorities, programmes, indicators and evaluation. In cases in which governments fail to involve stakeholders effectively, adequate safeguards and conditionalities must be implemented to improve participation;
- opposes any form of macroeconomic conditionality in the national and regional partnership plans (NRPPs). The disbursement of EU funds must not be linked to unrelated structural reform proposals;
- stresses that the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the Just Transition Fund should remain stand-alone instruments in the next MFF with increased funding;
- stresses that adequate funding for civil society and media programmes (AgoraEU, CERV) is essential democratic infrastructure, not optional expenditure;
- welcomes the strong competitiveness dimension in the next MFF, emphasising the central role of research and innovation for sustainable internal growth, strategic autonomy, water resilience and the green and digital transitions, and therefore supports the creation of a European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and the reinforcement of Horizon Europe with higher allocations;
- calls for EU funding under the 'multifund regulation' to be conditional on social criteria to be developed together with national social partners. Regarding the ECF, the EESC proposes further incentives for companies to invest in qualification and training of their workforce or to invest in high-unemployment or industrial transition regions;
- welcomes the increased budget for Global Europe as crucial to strengthening the huge potential of EU external action.

OWN RESOURCES-2025 PROPOSAL

COM(2025) 574 final 2025/0574 CNS

| ECO/684

| EESC Rapporteurs: Katriņa ZARIŅA, Petru Sorin DANDEA

22/01/2026

The EESC:

- underlines that the debate on new own resources should evolve beyond technical adjustments and become a strategic reflection on how to strengthen the EU's financial autonomy, cohesion and competitiveness;
- encourages the European Commission to further refine the overall design of the proposed own-resources package to make it ambitious, balanced and future-oriented. The Commission should: (a) set out a clear roadmap towards gradually reducing reliance on GNI-based contributions; (b) design measures and promote cohesion and fairness, ensuring that all Member States contribute in proportion to their economic strength; (c) integrate a competitiveness and SME impact lens in all new own-resources proposals; (d) maintain a degree of flexibility in crisis-response mechanisms;
- invites the Council and the European Parliament to build a broad and lasting consensus through a pragmatic, phased and evidence-based approach. The institutions should: (a) advance the proposals that are ready for implementation first – such as the CBAM -based resource, the modernised plastics contribution and the reform of customs retention – while allowing more time for discussion and analysis of complex instruments; (b) agree on a joint interinstitutional review clause so that all new own resources are assessed within two years from the entry into force; (c) ensure that mechanisms to prevent regressivity and compensate Member States on the EU's external borders are integrated into the final package;
- finds that the Corporate Resource for Europe (CORE) proposal lacks clarity on its practical functioning expresses some reservations about the CORE proposal as a whole;
- welcomes the positive contribution that both CBAM and the e-waste mechanism could bring to sustainability and circularity;
- notes that the tobacco excise duty own resource proposal should be designed carefully to avoid negative effects in border regions or incentives for illicit trade;
- supports the reduction of customs-duty retention to 10% as a step towards greater EU financial coherence, provided that appropriate compensatory mechanisms are established;
- welcomes the removal of the EUR 150 de-minimis threshold for parcels sent to the EU from third countries and the introduction of an e-commerce handling fee as of November 2026, with this handling possibly becoming a new own resource of the EU budget.

GLOBAL EUROPE (MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL)

COM(2025) 551 final 2025/0227 COD

| REX/611

| EESC Rapporteurs: Mateusz SZYMAŃSKI, Luca JAHIER

03/12/2025

The EESC:

- welcomes the Commission proposal to increase expenditure on the EU's external policies under the upcoming multiannual financial framework (MFF), with a Global Europe instrument including a Reserve for Ukraine, and considers this increase essential for the EU to affirm its role as a global player and values, as well as to build strategic autonomy;
- considers that the EU should play a leading role in development and humanitarian efforts and in revitalising the UN system, with the Global Gateway becoming its main instrument;
- points out that the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities Advisory Board for the Global Gateway has remained disconnected from decision-making and created fragmented dialogue. The EESC calls to ensure meaningful participation, including of the EESC and the CoR;
- emphasises the need to build consistency between foreign policy, development, trade and the European Competitiveness Fund to achieve sustainable development and economic resilience;
- despite the positive assessment of the proposed flexibility in external action, expects full transparency and accountability in the spending of funds;
- calls to extend the Commission's Inequality Marker to Global Gateway projects;
- expects existing bodies, such as civil society platforms, to be engaged more extensively in maintaining relations with organisations in partner countries;
- supports all efforts to reinforce prosperity and security in our neighbourhood and thus within the EU, and supports further enlargement of the Union;
- stresses the need for predictable and stable funding for civil society organisations, notably to strengthen democracy, civic space and gender equality;
- expects that the objectives on economic cooperation and entrepreneurship will be accompanied by ambitious social, human rights and environmental safeguards;
- opposes the approach of suspending payments in the context of migration policy, emphasising the need for positive incentives to achieve the stated goals.

EU FUND FOR COHESION, AGRICULTURE AND RURAL, FISHERIES AND MARITIME, PROSPERITY AND SECURITY

COM(2025) 565 final 2025/0240 COD

| ECO/683

| EESC Rapporteurs: Florian MARIN, David SVENTEK

22/01/2026

The EESC:

- welcomes the Commission's desire to simplify and to ensure more flexibility, but believes that the simplification provided for requires concrete guarantees in order for it to be effective. In order to safeguard the distinct identity and core mission of the EU's key policies, their identity, visibility, predictability and long-term objectives must be preserved, ensuring that flexibility does not come at the expense of the regions, communities, sectors and the most vulnerable groups;
- is concerned that grouping a diverse set of investment needs such as agriculture, fisheries, cohesion and security under one umbrella could create competition between priorities and weaken long-term guarantees; strongly opposes this approach since it risks diluting resources, impairing efforts to achieve the climate and digital transitions;
- expressly warns that the architecture of the multifunds might fuel distributional conflicts. Both at the beginning and during the course of the future funding period, there is a risk of structural competition between the social dimension, regional and rural development, and security and migration policy;
- opposes the shift in responsibility from the regional to the national level, as this undermines the subsidiarity principle, territoriality, multi-level governance and trust in the EU;
- stresses that the effective functioning of the national and regional partnership plans (NRPPs) will require the strong and effective involvement of local and regional partners, the social partners and civil society organisations, as well as of representatives of sectors and industries, both in the programming phase and when it comes to implementation, management, monitoring, evaluation and control;
- is proposing to have a social partners and civil society organisation check alongside a regional check;
- stresses that the partnership must be reflected in each chapter of the NRPP and emphasises the need for a balanced representation of relevant partners in the monitoring committees;
- calls on the European Commission to carry out, without delay, the revision of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership;
- suggests introducing a penalty system for cases of a lack of effective, meaningful and cross-cutting involvement of the social partners and civil society organisations;
- considers that cohesion policy should be further consolidated, since it is weakened by the proposal; calls for guarantees to protect regions and cities, especially where Member States may exclude them;
- stresses that more imperative rules are needed to guarantee the involvement of local actors and cities and that subnational interests must not be penalised;
- calls for specific thematic concentrations on food security, inequality, ageing with dignity and civic engagement, with support for vulnerable groups, volunteers and social economy actors;
- warns that social objectives must be clearly defined, and stresses that the social spending target of 14% should exclusively target ESF objectives such as qualifications and training as well as support for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups;
- strongly criticises the absence of a dedicated Just Transition Fund and warns against merging the just transition with the clean transition.

ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN FUND FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT INCLUDING FOR EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION (INTERREG) AND THE COHESION FUND

COM(2025) 552 final 2025/0238 COD

| ECO/685

| EESC Rapporteur: David SVENTEK

03/12/2025

The EESC:

- stresses that the need to reduce regional and territorial disparities remains one of the key priorities of EU integration and that the use of traditional, proven and effective cohesion policy instruments is the right way forward to support sustainable prosperity across all regions of the EU;
- recommends clarifying the role of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund (CF) within the National Regional Partnership Fund (NRPF), not only through general and specific objectives, but also through specific elaboration in the regulation. The EESC would welcome it if the draft regulation to which this opinion relates were to be elaborated and supplemented at least by an annex offering guidance on how to effectively integrate the ERDF and the CF into the NRPF;
- insists that the new arrangements should not lead to a reduction in the importance and mission of the ERDF and the CF, particularly in supporting the development of lagging regions and the transformation of industrial areas. It also emphasises the importance of the partnership principle in the design of future programmes;
- agrees with the content and thematic focus of the future Interreg programme and its synergies with the Global Europe programme in the specific cases proposed;
- generally, agrees with the innovative approach of the proposal regarding the future of the established Interreg programme, particularly in terms of accepting the implementation structure at the level of the individual chapters of the Interreg Plan;
- draws attention to the risk of the relevant actors at regional cross-border level not being able to reach an agreement, given that the draft regulation is not very detailed. It also recommends adopting the implementing act immediately after the regulation is adopted;
- recommends ensuring that the interpretation and implementation of the funds at Member State level are comparable and that there are no significant differences between Member States;
- supports the simplification of implementation and administrative processes for more efficient use of funds;
- appreciates that the proposal for a Regulation on the ERDF and the CF also provides for the possibility of supporting sustainable urban development and, within that framework, integrated urban and territorial development strategies focused on sustainable development and addressing challenges in the areas of the environment, energy and climate, fair transition to a clean, climate-neutral and resilient economy, with particular attention to affordable housing, poverty, cultural heritage and the use of the potential of digital technologies for innovation and energy efficiency.

AGORAEU AND JUSTICE PROGRAMMES

COM(2025) 463 final 2025/0255 COD

| SOC/843

| EESC Rapporteur: Ionuț SIBIAN

04/12/2025

The EESC:

- welcomes the Commission's proposals for the AgoraEU and Justice programmes, and urges the European Parliament and Council to endorse the proposals without reducing the proposed financial envelope;
- calls for explicit recognition of advocacy as a core part of civil society organisations' (CSOs) work and their role in policymaking to strengthen democracy and resilience;
- recommends introducing operating grants across all AgoraEU strands to reinforce CSOs' institutional stability, and it requests extending operating grants under the Justice programme to non-profit organisations of general European interest;
- supports maintaining financial support to third parties (FSTP) via intermediary organisations to reach smaller or grassroots groups, and calls for ensuring the independence of intermediaries and the compliance of their governance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as key eligibility criteria in their selection. The EESC also requests clarity on co-financing rates, proposing up to 100% EU funding for intermediaries and final beneficiaries implementing delegated activities;
- notes the need to adapt the Creative Europe Desks' mandate and resources to effectively support AgoraEU's broader scope across cultural, media, and civic sectors;
- calls for flexibility and safeguards (e.g. indexation, corrective mechanisms) in lump-sum and multiannual grants to prevent financial strain on beneficiaries;
- seeks clarity on synergies between the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and the Media+ strand of AgoraEU; and it urges the Commission to connect grant recipients and develop an action plan to operationalise combined and cumulative funding under both Regulations, including joint calls, DG cooperation, and performance monitoring;
- recommends strengthening the focus on victims' rights and access to justice in the Justice programme, including funding for support networks, practitioner training, and cross-border legal aid;
- calls for addressing intra-EU funding disparities, particularly the East–West divide, in both programmes;
- regrets the removal of the Civil Dialogue Working Group from the AgoraEU Regulation and urges its reinstatement;
- emphasises that programme impact depends on adequate national infrastructure and co-funding, and proposes linking access to EU shared management funds to Member States' demonstrated support for AgoraEU and Justice objectives.

PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION ON ERASMUS+

COM(2025) 549 final 2025/0222 COD

| SOC/842

| EESC Rapporteurs: Nicoletta MERLO, Katrīna LEITĀNE

22/01/2026

The EESC:

- emphasises the need for a clear structure within the Erasmus+ programme, ensuring distinct recognition of Youth, Education and Training, and Sport, each with dedicated actions and definitions;
- calls for a minimum of 15% of the total budget to be allocated to Youth and at least 26.2% to Vocational Education and Training (VET);
- warns against restructuring that could diminish the visibility of key actions, advocating for a 'support to policy development' action as a separate component to 'cooperation among organisations and institutions' to foster youth participation and democratic engagement;
- underscores the importance of robust monitoring, participatory governance, and safeguarding the unique identity of the European Solidarity Corps, while maintaining accessibility for young people with fewer opportunities;
- urges inclusiveness beyond the EU, continued support for professional mobility, and targeted outreach to disadvantaged groups, particularly NEETs;
- stresses the need to strengthen Erasmus+ socio-economic impact by prioritizing learning mobility, enhancing VET funding, and promoting cooperation between education providers and the labor market to drive innovation in skills development.

ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND AS PART OF THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP PLAN

COM(2025) 558 final 2025/0239 COD

| SOC/845

| EESC Rapporteur: Nicoletta MERLO

22/01/2026

The EESC:

- calls for raising social spending in National and Regional Partnership Plans from 14% to 20% and earmarking at least 14% for the European Social Fund (ESF) to reinforce the EU's social dimension;
- insists on preserving the ESF's distinct structure through mandatory national and regional programmes to safeguard its added value;
- urges substantial simplification of ESF procedures and stronger administrative capacity to improve fund accessibility and delivery;
- calls for dedicating at least 1% of ESF resources to capacity-building for social partners and civil society organisations both at regional and national level;
- demands meaningful, continuous involvement of social partners and civil society, including full voting rights in monitoring committees;
- reaffirms the importance of multi-level governance and direct regional engagement with the Commission to maintain a strong territorial dimension of the ESF;
- supports deeper complementarities between EU funds, particularly through robust multi-fund approaches between the ESF and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
- calls for major investment in education, training and lifelong learning, with a strong focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), green and digital skills;
- calls for allocating at least 20% of ESF resources to financing the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee and to support quality youth employment;
- demands increased investment, raising the share from 25% to 30%, in social inclusion, poverty reduction and high-quality social services, including community-based care and affordable housing;
- insists on clearer, more accessible ESF communication and outreach to ensure citizens and stakeholders understand available opportunities.

UNION SUPPORT FOR ASYLUM, MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION; INTERNAL SECURITY; AND INTEGRATED BORDER MANAGEMENT AND VISA POLICY

COM(2025) 540 final 2025/0540 COD

| SOC/844

| EESC Rapporteur: José Antonio MORENO DÍAZ

19/02/2026

The EESC:

- stresses the urgent need to establish an immigration policy that provides legal, safe and effective channels for access to the EU. This stance aligns with its previous opinions, in which the EESC underlined the importance of ensuring legal pathways into the EU, protecting the fundamental rights of migrants and improving the management of mobility within the EU;
- notes that the three regulations taken together reveal a structural reorientation of the EU's priorities, with a marked shift towards control and security. The strong focus on security, both internal and external, tends to overlook support measures on integration and inclusion. The EESC emphasises that migration policy cannot be reduced to a security-driven approach;
- notes that a full set of tools and instruments to manage regular migration and avoid irregularity are important elements of a well-functioning migration system, including return when applicable and in full compliance with EU and international law. However, their implementation must be carefully balanced, with respect for fundamental rights, in particular the right to individual protection;
- considers it essential to improve the mechanisms for independent monitoring of fundamental rights and humanitarian conditions at borders, with transparent reporting mechanisms;
- believes that the three regulations adopted together for 2028–2034 place strong emphasis on security measures and the outsourcing of border control and raise concerns about potential risks to fundamental rights. It is essential to ensure that fundamental human rights are protected at the same time.

COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP) POST-2027

COM(2025) 560 final 2025/0241 COD

| NAT/960

| EESC Rapporteurs: Joe HEALY, Arnold PUECH d'ALISSAC

22/01/2026

The EESC:

- rejects the Commission's proposal. It has no directional purpose, clear objectives or long-term vision for EU agriculture other than imposing a major CAP budget cut;
- highlights the risks associated with agricultural and cohesion investments having to compete for funds in the new budget construction;
- calls for an increased, standalone and dedicated CAP budget, properly adjusted for inflation and restored to a level of 0.5% of EU GDP. This should include a more ambitious ringfenced allocation for rural areas, and a strong budget allocation for generational renewal strategies and targeted support measures for new young entrants and female farmers;
- considers that direct payments should be capped at a fair and reasonable level for individual active farmers, supporting the mandatory threshold of EUR 100 000 as proposed by the European Commission, and that the Commission should not discriminate against genuine active farmers based on old age or pension status in the allocation of direct payments, but should rather incentivise targeted financial schemes to facilitate the transfer of the farm ownership from older farmers and pensioned farmers to young farmers;
- stresses the need for the CAP to complement the principle of equivalence of standards, recognising that European farmers adhere to much higher environmental, social and health standards than those applied in other countries;
- encourages protective science-based climate and environmental practices and sustainable, holistic systems of production such as organic and regenerative farming and other agroecological systems, through voluntary, sufficiently funded initiative measures;
- supports strengthening the EU food supply chain in terms of rebalancing power in the food supply chain, the abolition of below-cost selling, crisis-proofing with improved and additional crisis management tools and insurance schemes against natural disasters;
- recognises the importance of consolidating social conditionality and assuring a clear link with the CAP proposals. No farm should be exempt from controls and penalties relating to social conditionality, and its overall integrity must not be undermined because of the fact that fines are set under national law.

REVISION OF THE UNION CIVIL PROTECTION MECHANISM

COM(2025) 548 final 2025/0223 COD

| NAT/962

| EESC Rapporteur: Florian MARIN

03/12/2025

The EESC recommends:

- more ambition in terms of addressing disaster risk reduction and prevention, rather than focusing primarily on response capacities. The establishment of an efficient and integrated Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) must include a comprehensive framework for risk reduction policies across the EU, as well as increased focus on cross-sectoral and cross-border disaster prevention, all implemented within a holistic risk management system;
- reducing administrative burdens, eliminating overlaps, upgrading inadequate data and support systems, increasing trained human resources and investing in interoperable capacities based on common standards and training pathways, while ensuring high-quality working conditions as prerequisites for strengthening societal resilience in a whole-of-society approach to crises;
- better anticipation and understanding of disasters and crises, while considering the role of propaganda and disinformation in amplifying social stress;
- strengthening the UCPM through supplementary funding, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups and regions, including the outermost regions and regions in proximity to war;
- ensuring coherence with National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) proposed for the 2028–2034 programming period;
- fostering greater complementarities between existing instruments such as Security Action for Europe, the European Solidarity Corps and the UCPM;
- ensuring sufficient and stable funding for professional firefighters and healthcare personnel to maintain efficiency and rapid response within the UCPM, while strengthening the role of volunteers;
- that the UCPM be built on flexibility to respect the diversity of national disaster management systems, while ensuring cross-border cooperation and coordination for a prompt and effective response to disasters that know no borders, with the full involvement of organised civil society;
- adapting procurement rules to guarantee rapid and effective provision of critical supplies and services in times of crisis;
- establishing a standardised form for reporting disasters to be used by all Member States.

REVISION OF THE COMMON MARKET ORGANISATION (CMO) REGULATION

COM(2025) 553 final 2025/0237 COD

| NAT/966

| EESC Rapporteur: Felipe MEDINA

21/01/2026

The EESC:

- welcomes the proposed modifications by the European Commission (EC) in the proposal COM(2025) 553 final for the revision of the Common Market Organisation (CMO);
- points out that there is a mismatch between the ambition reflected in the proposals – which give Member States (MS) the opportunity to add new sectoral interventions – and the fact that the proposed budget ringfenced for the CAP is smaller than the current budget and that Member States are being called upon to co-finance interventions, which is not the case today for fruit and vegetables. This may also jeopardise the functioning of the internal market;
- recognises the effort made by the EC to simplify the CMO Regulation in various aspects. It aims to facilitate its understanding, promote its development and implementation, and thereby improve the functioning of the different measures, with a view to enhancing the situation of farmers and other operators along the agri-food chain. The current sectoral interventions will run beyond the end of the current budget period and that there is therefore a need for transitional arrangements;
- emphasises the need for the essential and strategic nature of the agri-food sector to be clearly recognised. Contingency protocols for crises and exceptional situations, to be developed by MS, should include this principle, ensuring that public authorities are obliged to facilitate the activities of all operators in the sector during crises. This is crucial to guaranteeing food supply at all times and to contributing to the reassurance of European citizens, thereby preventing unnecessary food hoarding and related safety issues;
- reiterates the need for transparency regarding the composition of food products and for this information to be readily accessible to consumers. Additionally, the EESC acknowledges the efforts made by the EC concerning meat product denominations but warns of the risk that certain measures aimed at protecting specific production sectors could have negative effects on other equally essential sectors;
- asks the EC to allow the use of the entire hemp plant, including flowers, and to simplify controls by prioritising administrative checks and reducing on-site inspections. In line with the EESC's support for effective, proportionate and evidence-based regulation, the Commission is invited to reconsider these amendments and adopt a risk-based approach that allows the use of hemp leaves and straw as feed materials, provided they derive from CAP-compliant varieties (<0.3% THC).

REVISION OF THE COMMON FISHERIES POLICY

COM(2025) 559 final 2025/0235 COD

| NAT/966

| EESC Rapporteur: Francisco Javier GARAT PÉREZ

21/01/2026

The EESC:

- calls for the mandatory and guaranteed allocation of EUR 6.1billion for the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), in line with the current 2021–2027 budget, to preserve one of the EU’s few exclusive competences and avoid competition with other sectors. A dedicated chapter should address fisheries ensuring adequate public investment and legal certainty for operators;
- is concerned about the apparent prioritisation of achieving the objectives of the non-binding European Ocean Pact, instead of prioritising contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the CFP, which is the objective defined under the TFEU and the CFP Regulation;
- welcomes the proposal to strengthen coherence and synergies with related initiatives and funds to avoid duplication of efforts and maximise the impact of public investments. However, it urges the EC to ensure that governments make the necessary investments to meet the objectives of the CFP;
- stresses the need to make the definition of small-scale coastal fishing more flexible, basing it on the criteria established by the FAO and the regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs);
- points out that it is imperative that Member States (MS) develop plans and measures to modernise and renew their vessels, to improve energy efficiency, on-board safety and working conditions, without increasing fishing capacity;
- welcomes the European Commission’s (EC) intention to establish a simple architecture without predefining measures and detailed eligibility rules at Union level in an overly prescriptive manner. The Committee urges the MS to maintain this spirit of flexibility and simplification when developing their national and regional partnership plans (NRCPs). It also calls for the establishment of guidelines on the ‘do no significant harm’ principle applicable across all sectors;
- agrees with the need to maintain a certain degree of flexibility in the determination of aid intensity rates, in order to allow MS to adapt their NRCPs to the specific characteristics of their sectors and regions;
- welcomes the new simplification and wording relating to operations eligible for State aid.

COMPETITIVENESS FUND

COM(2025) 555 final 2025/0555 COD

| INT/1101

| EESC Rapporteur: Milena ANGELOVA

03/12/2025

The EESC:

- supports the creation of the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) as a cornerstone of the next EU budget and a driver of innovation, resilience and security, stressing that funding must remain firmly aligned with sustainability and the EU's social market economy;
- calls for EU-wide, merit-based project selection, with clear criteria such as excellence, future orientation and economic potential. To avoid national gatekeeping, the EESC urges transparent procedures, equal access for applicants in all Member States, and the active involvement of social partners and civil society in governance;
- recommends introducing a "market referendum", requiring projects seeking major EU top-ups—such as IPCEIs or other large-scale investments—to mobilise a share of private capital first. This market-test mechanism would help validate project quality, reduce politicised funding decisions and strengthen the link between public support and real competitiveness;
- stresses the need for strong risk-assessment and prevention tools, ensuring that ECF resources are channelled only to projects that genuinely enhance Europe's competitiveness and avoid repeating past shortcomings in EU funding programmes;
- highlights the importance of supporting SMEs, regional and cross-border innovation ecosystems, and investment in skills and decent work, while simplifying procedures and ensuring governance that is transparent, predictable and inclusive.

The EESC:

- considers the indicative budget of EUR175002000000 proposed for the period 2028-2034 to be encouraging and that it sends out a strong signal of support for scientific excellence and the aim of investing in research and innovation (R&I) and disruptive technologies. However, the EESC recommends that it be used only as a baseline figure for discussions between the Council and the European Parliament;
- deems it imperative to improve monitoring the use of funds and to identify obstacles to their use or factors in underspending in certain countries;
- recommends maintaining and correctly aligning Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund, particularly the fund's four policy components and the corresponding activities under Pillar II of Horizon Europe 'Competitiveness';
- recommends that, in order to support the entire innovation cycle from fundamental research to placing on the market, project assessment and selection procedures must not only be based on scientific excellence, but also on additional assessment criteria designed to better understand commercial relevance, industrial impact and the contribution to European strategic autonomy and competitiveness of European industry;
- recommends maintaining a four-year term of office, renewable once for the President of the European Research Council (ERC), instead of reducing it to two years;
- considers that Pillar I relating to research and excellent science in the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA) (Article9 of the proposal for a Council Decision on Horizon Europe and Article13 of the proposal for a Regulation establishing the Horizon Europe framework programme) should not be guided by any particular policy stance, and recommends maintaining a bottom-up focus ('directionality') instead of the top-down focus proposed by the Commission;
- recommends the utmost caution regarding the condition of 3% of GDP, provided for in Pillar IV 'European Research Area' in the proposed regulation, for the financing of capacity building measures from 2030 onwards, as it is in danger of affecting beneficiaries in countries with lower R&I capacities.

SINGLE MARKET AND CUSTOMS PROGRAMME 2028-2034

COM(2025) 590 final 2025/0590 COD

| INT/1102

| EESC Rapporteur: Vasco DE MELLO

21/01/2026

The EESC:

- considers that the programme in question pursues the right strategy by devising measures and support aimed at increasing and improving cooperation between the Commission and Member States, and among the Member States, in matters pertaining to the single market, Customs Union, taxation and fraud-combating efforts;
- urges the European Commission to encourage Member States to boost human resources when it comes to customs as well as tax services collecting customs duties and taxes, especially in those Member States that receive the most imports from Asia, and with regard to parcels sent via digital platforms that are located there;
- calls for the simplification of EU regulations to be accompanied by the same manner of changes in every Member State's legislation, so that national laws do not make it difficult for individuals and businesses to apply the rules;
- recommends that digitalisation of the procedures to be followed by individuals and businesses not be accompanied by increased complexity or an increase in their reporting or other obligations;
- considers it important to support consumer associations, given the key role they play in consumer dispute resolution arrangements, in monitoring the compliance of products circulating on the single market, and in efforts to boost financial literacy

CONNECTING EUROPE FACILITY - 2028-2034

COM(2025) 547 final 2025/0221 COD

| TEN/859

| EESC Rapporteurs: Mateusz SZYMAŃSKI, Tomas ARVIDSSON

22/01/2026

The EESC:

- welcomes the recognition of the need for investments, in particular the urgent need to strengthen the EU's resilience and improve security. The Committee demands for an increase in CEF III funding to at least 100 billion euros;
- considers it appropriate to include, in the next programming period, investments extending beyond the EU, through the expansion of TEN-T corridors to candidate countries;
- emphasizes that in order to ensure territorial cohesion and full use of the single market, the programme should prioritise investments in regions with significant infrastructure gaps, support projects aimed at securing critical infrastructure and bottlenecks, in particular in cohesion recipient countries and regions bordering Russia and Belarus, which are openly hostile towards EU countries;
- thinks that investments implemented within a single Member State should not be entirely excluded, where such investments meet the needs and objectives of the CEF and are significant for TEN-T and TEN-E;
- proposes earmarking funds to enable the CEF project started to be completed, and specifying which projects will be given priority. The funding criteria should be linked to social and environmental criteria and ensure European added value;
- demands to introduce procedures for mid-term and ex-post evaluation of expenditures implemented through the CEF as well as the monitoring rules for the CEF. Simplification of the application process and acceleration the disbursement of the funds in view to accelerate implementation of the investments are necessary.

EU BUDGET EXPENDITURE TRACKING AND PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

COM(2025) 545 final 2025/0545 COD

| ECO/698

| EESC Rapporteurs: Konstantinos DIAMANTOUROS, Dominika BIEGON

18/06/2026

The EESC:

- supports the initiative to establish a unified and coherent set of output and result indicators across the entire Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), to harmonise the application of horizontal principles, to introduce a single annual management and performance report, and to create a single portal for all MFF-related information;
- points out that the Performance Regulation implicitly defines the scope of eligible programmes on an ex-ante basis, with disbursement of EU funds is linked to the achievement of milestones and targets to be defined by output and result indicators. This renders the framework highly political;
- stresses that, where payments are conditional on milestones and targets, results are often difficult to measure in a timely fashion, particularly for social interventions. Therefore proposes that an opt-out option be introduced in the performance framework: public authorities should be able either to apply cost-based financing in the implementation of NRRP's in the event of objective difficulties in collecting and measuring data, or to supplement the quantitative reporting with qualitative indicators;
- calls for efforts to promote the visibility of biodiversity spending within the broader environmental target;
- recommends ensuring a transparent, predictable and proportionate application of the 'do no significant harm' (DNSH) principle across the EU budget. The principle should be applied consistently across programmes and be supported by a clear definition of what constitutes significant harm. Its application should be proportionate to the actual risks posed by an initiative to the objectives protected by the DNSH principle. This proportionality should avoid unduly penalising activities that, when carried out within the EU, are already significantly more climate and environmentally friendly than comparable activities elsewhere, thereby reducing the risk of offshoring investments to jurisdictions with lower standards. Furthermore, the application of the DNSH principle should take into account the size and capacity of beneficiaries, recognising that smaller entities may face greater challenges in meeting reporting requirements. Finally, the EESC believes that the exemption of defence from the DNSH principle should be targeted and not allow for a broad exemption of activities under the guise of dual use;
- urges that funding counted under the social investment quota remain focused on the core objectives of the European Social Fund (ESF);
- considers that Article 6 of the Performance Regulation needs to be strengthened to ensure that, where feasible, appropriate and in accordance with sector-specific rules, EU-funded programmes and activities contribute to creating and maintaining quality jobs through proportionate social conditionalities and recommends an annual reporting on the quality of jobs;
- recommends identifying quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure organised civil society and social partner engagement, from design to implementation stage, making the partnership principle in the context of the NRPP more effective, meaningful;
- points out that civil society organisations and social partners are expected to use the Performance Regulation indicators to translate policy into local strategy. Therefore, the EESC recommends co-legislators to increase technical assistance;
- is in favour of introducing gender mainstreaming into the Performance Framework as a horizontal principle;

- proposes certain changes to ANNEX I of the Commission proposal "Intervention fields and indicators", to be consulted in the annex to this EESC opinion.



Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99
1040 Bruxelles/Brussel
BELGIQUE/BELGIË
eesc.europa.eu



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