

**FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
**TO THE OPINIONS OF THE**  
**EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE**  
**PLENARY SESSION OF DECEMBER 2020<sup>1</sup>**

**DISCLAIMER:**

**Due to current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, announcements made in this report may be subject to revision in coming weeks or months.**

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<sup>1</sup> Including the follow-up to one opinion adopted during the September 2020 Plenary session.

N°	Title	References
<b>JUST</b>		
1.	<u><a href="#">The need to guarantee real rights for persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections</a></u> (additional opinion)  Rapporteur: Krzysztof PATER (PL-III)	SOC/638  EESC-2020-01950-00-00-AC
2.	<u><a href="#">Public services principles for stability of democratic order</a></u> <u><a href="#">(Exploratory opinion at the request of the German presidency)</a></u>  Rapporteur: Christian MOOS (DE-III) Co-rapporteur: Philip VON BROCKDORFF (MT-II)	SOC/643  EESC-2020-02236-00-00-AC
<b>EMPL</b>		
3.	<u><a href="#">Towards an EU strategy for enhancing green skills and competences for all</a></u> <u><a href="#">(own-initiative opinion)</a></u>  Rapporteur: Tatjana BABRAUSKIENE (LT-II)	SOC/636  EESC-2020-01255-00-00-AC
<b>HOME</b>		
4.	<u><a href="#">EU Agenda and action plan on Drugs 2021-2025</a></u>  Rapporteur-general: Ákos TOPOLANSZKY (HU-III)	SOC/658  COM(2020) 606 final  EESC-2020-04256-00-00-AC
<b>MOVE</b>		
5.	<u><a href="#">2020 Single European Sky 2+</a></u>  Rapporteur-general: Dumitru FORNEA (RO-II)	TEN/722  COM(2020) 577 final COM(2020) 579 final  EESC-2020-05081-00-00-AC
<b>MARE</b>		
6.	<u><a href="#">Fisheries – transposition of IATTC measures</a></u>  Rapporteur: Francisco Javier GARAT PEREZ (ES-III)	NAT/799  COM(2020) 308 final  EESC-2020-04492-00-00-AC

<b>LS</b>		
7.	<a href="#"><u>Cross-border payments/Codification</u></a> Rapporteur: Gonçalo LOBO XAVIER (PT-I)	INT/914 COM(2020) 323 final EESC-2020-04216-00-00-AC
<b>GROW</b>		
8. Assoc: EMPL	<a href="#"><u>Industrial transition towards a green and digital European economy</u></a> Rapporteur-general: Lucie STUDNICNA (CZ-II)	INT/913 EESC-2020-03642-00-00-AC
<b>CNECT</b>		
9. Opinion adopted during the Plenary session of September 2020	<a href="#"><u>Secure 5G deployment – EU toolbox</u></a> Rapporteur: Alberto MAZZOLA (IT-I) Co-rapporteur: Dumitru FORNEA (RO-II)	TEN/704 COM(2020) 50 final EESC-2020-00956-00-00-AC- TRA

<p><b>N° 1      The need to guarantee real rights for persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections (additional opinion)</b>  <b>EESC 2020/1950 - SOC/638</b>  <b>556<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – December 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Krzysztof PATER (PL-III)</b>  <b>DG JUST – Commissioner REYNDEERS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>2.4. The EESC calls on the EP, the European Council and Member States to urgently amend the 1976 Electoral Act<sup>2</sup> by clarifying the principles of universality, directness and secrecy of elections, which would make it possible to implement standards throughout the EU that would guarantee real voting rights for persons with disabilities, in accordance with Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The standards should include at least the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a ban on depriving people of the right to vote in EP elections on the grounds of disability or health status,</li> <li>• obligation to provide information on voting rules in a form suitable to the needs resulting from the type of disability,</li> <li>• allowing individuals unable to access their polling station due to their disability to vote independently outside the polling station,</li> <li>• implementing solutions that would enable persons with disabilities in need of significant support – such as persons who are deafblind, blind, visually impaired or having limited</li> </ul>	<p>Democracy is a founding value of the European Union. Citizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament, the Members of which must be elected by direct universal suffrage in a free and secret ballot.</p> <p>The Commission takes the rights of citizens, including citizens with disabilities, to vote and stand in the elections to the European Parliament very seriously.</p> <p>Fostering the participation of persons with disabilities in the democratic process is one of the priorities of the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, presented by the Commission on 3 March 2021<sup>3</sup>. This strategy supports the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) by the EU and its Member States, in line with respective competencies, including as regards Article 29 of the UNCRPD on participation in political and public life.</p> <p>It also includes a dedicated section (3.2) with proposals to foster the participation of persons with disabilities in the</p>

<sup>2</sup> [OJ L 278, 1976](#), [OJ C 340, 1997](#), [OJ L 283, 2002](#)

<sup>3</sup> COM(2021)101, [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0101 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

<p>manual dexterity - to vote independently, without relying on assistance from other people,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the possibility of changing the designated polling station to one that is more suited to the needs of voters with disabilities,</li> <li>• a person's right to freely choose a personal assistant who will support them in exercising their right to vote.</li> </ul>	<p>democratic process. In particular, the strategy refers to the announcement made in the 2020 Citizenship Report<sup>4</sup>, indicating that the Commission will work with Member States, including through dedicated discussions in the European Cooperation Network on Elections<sup>5</sup> and the European Parliament to guarantee political rights of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.</p> <p>Promoting democratic participation is a shared responsibility among the local, national and European levels. The Commission has focussed on encouraging best practices to increase the participation of young people and vulnerable and underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities.</p> <p>The Commission will discuss, in 2022, in the framework of the high-level event on elections announced in the Democracy Action Plan, practices on inclusive democracy with the aim that candidate lists reflect the diversity of our societies.</p> <p>On this basis, and in close cooperation with Member States in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections, the Commission will establish, in 2023, a guide of good electoral practice addressing participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission seeks to address the needs of citizens with a disability in the compendium on e-voting envisaged under the European</p>
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<sup>4</sup> Commission, 2020: [EU Citizenship Report 2020](#): Empowering citizens and protecting their rights.

<sup>5</sup> [European Cooperation Network on elections](#).

	<p>Democracy Action Plan.</p> <p>The Commission has provided substantial funding since 2014 to support such activities, promote the exchange of good practices among the competent national authorities, and have studies conducted of such activities and of the challenges that underrepresented groups of citizens face in the exercise of their democratic rights. In this regard, the Commission's report on the 2019 elections to the European Parliament reviewed measures in Member States to promote the democratic participation of all European citizens, including those with disabilities.</p> <p>The Commission will continue to work with the Member States through the European Cooperation Network on Elections to facilitate the exchange of good practices and improve the ability of EU citizens, including those with disabilities, to exercise their voting rights including by supporting the exchange of best practices and mutual assistance to ensure free and fair elections.</p>
<p>5.2. There are currently many examples in the EU of unjustified differentiation in the rights of people with disabilities and, therefore, discrimination against them. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a person with citizenship of two EU Member States could, depending on the identity document they chose, either vote completely independently or be deprived of the right to vote due to their intellectual disability;</li> <li>• a person who is bedridden and requiring 24-hour care cannot vote because they are unable to get to the</li> </ul>	<p>The Commission facilitates the exchange of good practice among Member States to promote inclusive participation in the democratic process, notably through the work of the European Cooperation Network on Elections. The network was established ahead of the 2019 European elections and continues as a forum for sharing learning and practices to support free and fair elections in Europe.</p> <p>This group met on 25 September 2020 with the participation of Commissioner</p>

<p>polling station and there is no other possibility of voting in the country of residence. However, if the same person lived in another EU country, they could vote freely by post, at a mobile ballot box or by internet;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a blind person in one Member State can vote fully independently, without any support whatsoever, but if they lived in another country it would be impossible – they could only vote at a polling station with the assistance of another person;</li> <li>• someone who had Parkinson's disease would be able to vote independently in a country where voting is based on making a simple graphic sign (e.g. "X") or selecting the relevant card from a package of cards they have received, but in a country where it is necessary to write a number, name or surname legibly on the ballot would face an insurmountable barrier;</li> <li>• someone with serious mobility issues (e.g. requiring crutches or a wheelchair) would be able to choose a suitable polling station in some countries, while other countries do not allow free choice of polling stations, which often prevents such people from participating in elections.</li> </ul> <p>The EESC considers such situations unacceptable and contrary to the basic values of the EU and the provisions of the TEU.</p>	<p>Reynders. Discussions specifically included the exchange of practices on inclusive participation, also on promoting the participation of citizens with a disability.</p> <p>The Commission has also committed to continuing this discussion at a specific meeting to be organised in 2021.</p> <p>The Commission will work with Member States in the European Cooperation Network on Elections to support full electoral participation and accessibility of the European elections (both as voter and as candidate), addressing underrepresented citizens, including citizens with a disability in order to guarantee the exercise of their political rights on equal basis with others.</p>
<p>5.3.2. The EESC considers it essential to clarify the principles of the directness and secrecy of the elections referred to in Article 1(3) of this Act by stating that when outlining detailed voting principles Member States are required to:</p>	<p>EU citizens, including those with disabilities, have the right to vote for and stand as a candidate in European Parliament elections in their country of origin, or if they live in another EU country, they may choose to vote and stand for election there, under the same</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enable persons who, due to disability, are unable to vote in a polling station to cast their votes directly and independently,</li> <li>• provide information on voting rules in a form adapted to the needs resulting from all types of disability,</li> <li>• decide on a kind of voting method and implement the necessary technical arrangements for persons with disabilities in need of significant support – such as people who are deafblind, blind, visually impaired or having limited manual dexterity - to be able to vote independently without the assistance of others,</li> <li>• guarantee all persons who have disabilities the possibility to change their designated polling station if they consider a different station to be better suited to their disability,</li> <li>• ensure all voters with disabilities the right to freely choose the person who will help them vote (personal assistant).</li> </ul>	<p>conditions as the nationals of that country.</p> <p>This is provided in Article 22 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Articles 39 and 40 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. Article 1 of the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage of 20 September 1976 ('1976 Act') provides that elections shall be by direct universal suffrage and shall be free and secret. Article 8 states that subject to the provisions of the Act, the electoral procedure shall be governed in each Member State by its national provisions. Member States are also bound by the UNCRPD.</p> <p>Subject to the respect of certain basic principles, such as those laid down in Articles 2 and 14 of the Treaty on European Union, it is the competence and the responsibility of the Member States to define the franchise and lay down the specific conditions for the conduct of elections, and of the competent national administrative and judicial authorities to ensure compliance with applicable law and relevant standards.</p> <p>As such, the Commission does not have a general competence in electoral matters.</p>
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<p><b>N° 2      Public services principles for stability of democratic order</b>  <b>(Exploratory opinion at the request of the German presidency)</b>  <b>EESC 2020/2236 - SOC/643</b>  <b>556<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – December 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Christian MOOS (DE-III)</b>  <b>Co-rapporteur: Philip VON BROCKDORFF (MT-II)</b>  <b>DG JUST – Commissioner REYNDEERS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1.5. To guarantee that public services in Europe act in all crisis situations as an automatic stabiliser, the European values enshrined in the EU Treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, Member States' guarantees of fundamental and human rights in national constitutions as well as the shared values of the Union in respect of services of general economic interest within the meaning of Article 14 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) as set out in the Treaty on European Union (TEU), Protocol No 26 on services of general interests, have to set the tone for the conduct of administration on the European level and, in accordance with their constitutions, in all EU Member States.</p>	<p>The Commission has expressed its position regarding the principles that should guide the response to crisis situations.</p> <p>Regarding the emergency measures adopted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission has made clear from the outset that the response to the crisis must fully respect the fundamental principles and values as set out in the Treaties. Emergency measures must be limited to what is necessary, strictly proportionate, clearly restricted in time, and in line with constitutionally enshrined safeguards, as well as European and international standards. Moreover, governments must make sure that such measures are subject to regular scrutiny, fully respecting democratic checks and balances.</p> <p>The Commission is closely monitoring the emergency measures taken in all Member States, and their impact, in particular, on the rule of law, on fundamental rights, and on EU law.</p>
<p>1.6 The EESC underlines furthermore, that functioning public services at all levels throughout the EU require the necessary skills and human, technical, material and financial resources, as well as proper</p>	<p>The Commission shares the understanding that skills, good working conditions and remuneration, appropriate financial and technical capacity, social dialogue for public</p>

<p>working conditions and sufficient remuneration, and social dialogue for public servants to carry out the tasks assigned to them and to function as an automatic stabiliser.</p>	<p>servants are fundamental for the functioning of the public services at all levels. Through the European Semester, the Commission has proposed recommendations to Member States for necessary actions. The EU funding and technical support instruments assist the implementation of many measures that intend to improve the legal framework, the human resources and financial management, develop competency frameworks and design and deliver trainings to public servants.</p> <p>As regards the justice system, the Commission has already stressed that sufficient resources, including the necessary investments into physical and technical infrastructure, and well-qualified, trained and adequately remunerated personnel of all categories, are necessary for its good functioning. The 2020 EU Justice Scoreboard presents comparative data on selected indicators regarding financial and human resources of the justice systems in the 27 Member States<sup>6</sup>.</p>
<p>1.7. The Member States are solely responsible for their public services, which they organise according to their traditional principles and in accordance with their constitutional law. Without prejudice to this, the EESC advocates an effective European legal framework (including sanctions) that guarantees the full compliance of all Member States with democracy and the rule of law according to the "Copenhagen Criteria", which are a necessary basis for</p>	<p>The Commission has been stressing the importance of effective institutions, independent and efficient justice systems and quality public administrations for the protection and promotion of the EU's shared values, including fundamental rights, democracy, and the rule of law.</p> <p>In particular, in the 2020 Rule of Law Report<sup>7</sup>, which is at the centre of the newly established European Rule of</p>

<sup>6</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "2020 EU Justice Scoreboard", adopted on 10 July 2020, COM(2020) 306

<sup>7</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, "2020 Rule of Law Report - The rule of law situation in the European Union", adopted on 30 September 2020, COM(2020) 580 final, {SWD(2020) 300-326}.

<p>good conduct by administrations in the EU and its Member States.</p>	<p>Law Mechanism, the Commission stressed that the rule of law requires an enabling ecosystem based, among others, on respect for judicial independence, effective anti-corruption policies, free and pluralistic media, and transparent and high-quality public administration.</p> <p>The Commission also supports Member States in implementing structural reforms in the field of public administration and justice, through technical assistance and funding of projects. The abovementioned 2020 Rule of Law Report provides a qualitative assessment of the situation of the rule of law in the European Union. It further reinforces and complements other EU instruments that encourage Member States to implement such structural reforms, and will frame the Commission's support to Member States and national stakeholders in addressing challenges.</p>
<p>3.4. The crisis in the Common European Asylum System</p>	<p>The Commission adopted the New Pact on Migration and Asylum on 23 September 2020. The New Pact reaffirms the EU common values and humanitarian responsibilities, notably providing assistance to individuals fleeing war and persecution. The New Pact covers all aspects of a comprehensive European approach to migration. It proposes a balanced, common framework based on the principles of integrated policy-making and fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity that protects the right to seek asylum.</p> <p>The proposals included in the Pact put in place a long-term migration policy that translate European values into a viable</p>

migration management. The New Pact proposes more efficient and faster procedures, including a pre-entry screening, and swifter decisions on asylum or return. Every person will have the right to individual assessment of their case and essential guarantees will be respected in the context of a procedure carried out at the border to ensure access to asylum as well as the right to an effective remedy.

Member States must also contribute to solidarity. The New Pact takes into account the different situations of Member States and fluctuating migratory pressures and proposes a system of mandatory solidarity through contributions from the Member States to support those under migratory pressure. Solidarity can be expressed through relocation of asylum seekers to committing to return individuals with no right to stay from the country of first entry, or providing various forms of capacity-building support in the field of asylum, reception and return, operational support, and support in the external dimension.

A solidarity mechanism to address the specificities of search and rescue operations is also foreseen based on voluntary contributions by Member States, which may become mandatory in case the voluntary contributions fall significantly short of the needs.

The New Pact also promotes legal pathways to the EU, both for economic and humanitarian reasons. The Commission remains highly committed to resettlement, which is a tried and tested legal pathway to protection in the EU.

	<p>In addition to resettlement, the Recommendation on legal pathways to protection in the EU<sup>8</sup> encourages the Member States to provide additional places of admission to those in need of protection through humanitarian admission and other complementary pathways, linked to education and work. Member States are invited to promote Community sponsorship schemes to give civil society a stronger, more structured role in the reception and integration of newcomers arriving through these legal pathways.</p>
<p>5.5. Public services in the EU Member States, for all their diversity, must obey three principles: neutrality, the application of law and order, and transparency. Shortcomings in the independence of the judiciary as well as constitutional amendments that undermine the aforementioned principles of public service and thus undermine the traditional principles of public services must lead to effective sanctions.</p>	<p>The Commission is following closely the developments regarding the rule of law in all Member States, including those related to the independence of the judiciary.</p> <p>The Commission has developed over the years its 'Rule of Law Toolbox' with tools to promote and uphold the rule of law, in particular to strengthen the effective capacity to address problems early on through preventive measures, and effectively take action wherever needed to contain problems when preventive measures fall short.</p>

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<sup>8</sup> OJ L317, 1 October 2020, p. 13 ff

<p><b>N°3      Towards an EU strategy for enhancing green skills and competences for all (own-initiative opinion)</b>  <b>EESC 2020/1255 - SOC/636</b>  <b>556<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – December 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Tatjana BABRAUSKIENE (LT-II)</b>  <b>DG EMPL – Commissioner SCHMIT</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1.3. The EESC calls on the European Commission and Member States to implement the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), which is to make quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning (LLL) a right for all in Europe, to apply it to improve provision of green skills and competences for environmental protection and professional skills for all to support the implementation of this principle with sustainable public funding agreed with the social partners and civil society.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the own initiative opinion and the call to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and its lifelong learning dimension, which is enshrined in its first principle. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan<sup>9</sup> highlights the need for continuous investment in education and training systems, notably in the context of the green and digital transitions. The action plan sets a new EU-level headline target for 2030 in the area of skills: at least 60% of adults should participate in training every year</p> <p>The Commission also agrees on the need for actions in skills development for environmental responsibility and recalls the European Skills Agenda adopted in July 2020<sup>10</sup>, which puts forward actions on green skills.</p> <p>The Porto Social commitment adopted in the context of the Porto summit on 7 May 2021 refers to investment in skills, lifelong learning and training responding to the economy’s and society’s needs.</p>
<p>1.5. The EESC reminds the European Commission and Member States to better connect environmental policies to</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the need to better connect environmental policies to</p>

<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en)

<sup>10</sup> COMMUNICATION COM(2020) 274 final “European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience” <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0274>

<p>employment and education policies. This should also help to focus on the skills anticipation and skills development of the unemployed or of people in work whose training should cover environmental responsibility and have a specific focus on green skills. Thus it is essential to ensure that climate change in learning and teaching is aligned with democratic school culture and with a learning environment of "green culture" that is experiencing the creation of green schools, which by having adequate climate-aware and environment-preserving infrastructure, are run sustainably in partnership with all school stakeholders and prepare pupils for combating climate change as active citizens and in their future jobs.</p>	<p>employment and education policies.</p> <p>The European Skills Agenda includes reference to helping to integrate environmental and climate considerations into school, higher education, vocational education and training, as well as professional training. Related to this, the Commission plans to develop a proposal for a Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability in 2021.</p> <p>Within the launch of the European Climate Pact, which provides a space for people to connect and collectively develop and implement climate solutions, the Commission is engaging stakeholders from Education and Training, Labour Market, Environmental organisations to cooperate on spreading awareness and supporting actions to fight climate change. This initiative is moreover focusing on 'green buildings' and 'green skills' as priority areas.</p> <p>As announced in the European Education Area Communication<sup>11</sup>, the Commission has launched the Education for Climate Coalition, aimed at supporting and promoting bottom-up, co-created sustainability actions involving pupils, students, teachers and education institutions around five priorities: green skills development, teacher training, behavioural change, 'citizen science' and awareness raising.</p>
<p>1.6. The EESC calls on the European Commission to conduct an EU-level research on green skills and competence development</p>	<p>As regards the development of green skills, the Commission agrees on the need to base its initiatives on evidence</p>

<sup>11</sup> COMMUNICATION COM(2020) 625 final on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0625&from=EN>

<p>within Member States and base its policy strategy on such research. Schools are a crucial source of information on environmental issues for students especially in the era of the know-it-all internet, of social media and fake news. However, more information is needed on the policies of the EU Member States on integrating climate change awareness, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development, as green skills and competences, within education policies and education curricula of early childhood education, general education and higher education. Such research should also focus on social and professional green skills and competences in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, initial education and training (IVET) sector and continuous education and training (CVET) sector, and upskilling and reskilling training of the unemployed and the workers.</p>	<p>and research. For this reason, the Joint Research Centre has already undertaken some preliminary research on Competences for Sustainability<sup>12</sup>.</p> <p>As foreseen in the European Skills Agenda, the Commission will develop a European competence framework on education for climate change, environmental issues, clean energy transition and sustainable development. This will spell out the different levels of green competence.</p> <p>The Commission is moreover cooperating with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) on skills intelligence through its Skills Panorama. CEDEFOP has also undertaken extensive work on green skills in the vocational education and training (VET) sector with a focus on policies in the member states.</p>
<p>1.8. The EESC welcomes that the new European Commission's European Skills Agenda (2020) focuses on green skills but regrets that it does not provide a target to countries on the share of adults' participation in quality and inclusive training on at least basic green skills and competences while it suggests a target on participation in adult training on basic digital skills.</p>	<p>The Commission understands the need to monitor the development and progression on the acquisition of green skills. In the case of digital skills, a European Framework was already developed in 2013 and has since been implemented for the development of new skills and for their monitoring.</p> <p>As regards skills needed for the green transition, the technical work on the development of a common framework and ways to monitor its development should precede the creation of a target.</p> <p>This technical work is announced in action 6 of the Skills Agenda, where the Commission commits to 'agreeing with Member States a set of indicators to</p>

<sup>12</sup> Bianchi, G. (2020), [Sustainability competences](#), Publications Office of the European Union.

	allow monitoring and statistical analysis of developments in green skills’.
1.10. The EESC welcomes the suggestion of the European Green Deal to set up a "European competence framework" and recommends to the Commission to develop this to be applicable to formal, informal and non-formal learning under the "Open Method of Cooperation" that would involve representatives of ministries of education, social partners from the education and training sectors, and other relevant stakeholders such as youth and educational NGOs.	As mentioned above, the Commission is working on the development of a competence framework and will ensure that the lifelong learning dimension is addressed, as this was the case of the Digital Competence and the Entrepreneurship Competence frameworks. The Commission will involve all relevant stakeholders in consultations for consolidating the framework.
1.13. The EESC calls for a comprehensive EU level strategy, such as a Council recommendation, on improving education and training on green skills and competences, developing green school strategies, and providing upskilling and reskilling to adults at and beyond the workplace in the skills needed for protecting the environment, for society and for greening the economy. We suggest that such a Council recommendation could follow up the suggestions of the new European Skills Agenda to focus on how to develop green attitude of everyone, making environmental responsibility as a transversal competence within education and training within the European Education Area, and focus on equality on green skills development for all ages and especially for socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Implementing the strategy in this way should also require that this improvement to education and training be accompanied by sustainable and adequate technical, financial and staff resources and	As announced in the Biodiversity strategy for 2030 <sup>13</sup> and in the European Education Area Communication, the Commission will propose a Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability in 2021. This will provide guidance for schools and teachers on how to cooperate and exchange experiences across Member States on biodiversity teaching. The Commission will also provide support materials and facilitate the exchange of good practices in EU networks of teacher-training programmes.  The Commission takes note of the Committee’s suggestions for a comprehensive European strategy.

<sup>13</sup> EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - COM(2020) 380 final  
[https://eur-ex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-ex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

funded by the public budget.	
<p>1.16. The EESC calls to ensure EU funding for green skills and competence of environmental protection, e.g. Erasmus+, the ESF+, the Recovery Package, and the Just Transition Fund should focus on providing financial support to green skills development of all age learners.</p>	<p>The Commission is already ensuring that funding for green skills is available through different funding lines. In particular, a European Green Deal Call foresees €1 billion investment to boost the green and digital transition and addresses ‘strengthening knowledge and empowering citizens’ as two horizontal areas for ensuring the development of green skills and attitudes.</p> <p>Under the Erasmus+ programme 2021, the following initiatives are relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ forward-looking projects includes climate and sustainability objectives;</li> <li>▪ Key Action 2, partnerships for cooperation, includes awareness-raising and support for the professional development of VET teachers and trainers (including small-scale partnerships);</li> <li>▪ ‘Partnerships for Excellence’ includes European Teachers Academies for innovative and sustainable collaboration.</li> </ul> <p>Significant funding possibilities to support green skills are available to the Member States under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the 2021-2027 funding instruments (notably the European Social Fund Plus and the Just Transition Fund). They are part of the contribution to mainstreaming climate actions and to the achievement of an overall target of 30% of the EU budget expenditure supporting climate objectives.</p>
<p>1.17. The EESC calls for greening the European Semester and requests the</p>	<p>The Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021 underlines as a core</p>

<p>Commission to work with the ministries of education, relevant social partners and civil society organisations in defining Country Specific Recommendations to EU Member States on enhancing provision of green skills and competences in all levels and types of education and training sectors, starting with early childhood education and going up to higher education and adult learning, taking into consideration effective support to adults in and beyond workplaces.</p>	<p>interest to deliver on European Pillar of Social Rights and the Green Deal. The four dimensions of environmental sustainability, productivity, fairness and macroeconomic stability identified remain, as in 2019, the guiding principles underpinning Member States' recovery and resilience plans and their national reforms and investments to be financed through the RRF. These dimensions lie at the heart of the European Semester and ensure that the new growth agenda helps to build foundations for a green, digital and sustainable recovery.</p> <p>The 2019 and 2020 Country specific Recommendations already cover the skills, education and training dimension for all Member States. The Commission strongly encourages Member States to include in their recovery and resilience plans investment and reforms in seven flagship areas, one of which is directly addressing re-skilling and upskilling supporting the green and digital transitions.</p>
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<p><b>N°4 EU Agenda and action plan on Drugs 2021-2025</b>  <b>COM(2020) 606 final</b>  <b>EESC 2020/4256 – SOC 658</b>  <b>556<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – December 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Ákos TOPOLANSZKY (HU-III)</b>  <b>DG HOME – Commissioner JOHANSSON</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1.7. The EESC recommends that the new drugs strategy and the new EU action plan(s) in this field should significantly improve the balance between demand reduction and harm reduction interventions in terms of both the number of strategic interventions and the allocation of resources.</p>	<p>The Commission continues to support and defend the evidence-based, balanced, integrated and multidisciplinary approach to drugs policy. This approach includes security measures relevant to drugs policy in balance with health and social aspects of drugs policy. Therefore, balance between security and health/social policy is crucial when tackling the drugs phenomenon – demand and harm reduction interventions are part of the health/social aspects within drugs policy.</p>
<p>4.18. Greater professional involvement by civil society is essential for the implementation of the fundamental principles. The European mandate of the Civil Society Forum on Drugs should therefore be strengthened, as should the involvement of civil society professionals in the Member States. To this end, it is necessary to regularly assess the openness of the Member States and their willingness to cooperate, along with their practices in terms of involving professional organisations in the decision-making process.</p>	<p>Involvement of civil society in the formulation and implementation of drugs policy is crucial to the success of the measures tackling the issue of drugs. That is why the Commission has supported the involvement of civil society organisations for several years – including those representing drug users and their families, as well as prevention and harm reduction services – through the Civil Society Forum on Drugs. The Commission has also actively encouraged the voice of civil society at EU level and with Member States.</p>
<p>4.19. The Committee believes that supply reduction interventions are important, but stresses that they must always be coordinated</p>	<p>The Commission holds the view that measures provided to drug using offenders as an alternative to conviction</p>

<p>with demand reduction interventions. While effective law enforcement and judicial tools are essential to tackling the illicit drugs trade, it has become clear in recent decades that unilateral criminalisation policies have a negative impact on the health of people and communities, as well as on the social integration of drug users.</p>	<p>or imprisonment are an evidence-based and fundamental form of support to people who need assistance due to their drug use. This view is based on mounting evidence that prison is a particularly detrimental environment for problem drug users. Therefore, the European Union Agenda and action plan on Drugs 2021-2025 prioritizes the implementation of effective alternatives to coercive sanctions for drug-using offenders and proposes the mainstreaming of such alternatives.</p>
<p>4.20. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that vulnerable groups of drug users are particularly exposed to the negative impact of the epidemiological situation, which could lead to a striking increase in the risks associated with drug use (reduced access to treatment, taking greater risks to buy drugs, buying more dangerous drugs, increased criminalisation and stigmatisation effects, negative consequences for public health, further reduction of basic livelihoods, etc.). Due to the pandemic, in many countries it is precisely those services that form the only interface between these groups and the treatment pathway that are liable to suffer the most from the situation and to be forced to reduce their capacity.</p>	<p>From the start of the pandemic, the Commission has been in close contact with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and other relevant EU agencies, Member States and civil society to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on the drug situation and take swift action where needed.</p> <p>EMCDDA has been active in providing the latest evidence-based findings on this topic. At EU level, the Commission continues to monitor developments acknowledging the impact of the pandemic on both health and social services to drug users as well as security measures.</p>

<p><b>N°5      2020 Single European Sky 2+ COM(2020) 577 final COM(2020) 579 final EESC 2020/5081 - TEN 722 556<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – December 2020 Rapporteur-general: Dumitru FORNEA (RO-II) DG MOVE – Commissioner VALEAN</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1.4. The function of the network manager needs to be clarified. In particular, the overall scope and its impact on airline planning, capacity management, airspace design, the environment and the prioritisation of demands.</p>	<p>It is important to note that network functions are performed jointly by the Network Manager and all stakeholders. Airlines are part of the governance of the network and take part in the cooperative decision-making process.</p> <p>The Network Manager contributes to the execution of the network functions through support measures and through measures aimed at the continuous improvement of network operations and performance of the network.</p> <p>One of the network function is to optimise airspace design where it is relevant for the network, but decisions on airspace design remain the prerogative of Member States. In terms of the environment, the network functions shall ensure the sustainable and efficient use of the airspace and of scarce resources, ensuring that airspace users can operate environmentally optimal trajectories.</p>
<p>1.5. All stakeholders in aviation should be engaged in reaching major decisions. The principle of meaningful consultation needs to be part of the framework proposal.</p>	<p>Article 29 of the amended proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of the Single European Sky<sup>14</sup> requires that air traffic service</p>

<sup>14</sup> COM(2020) 579 final.

	<p>providers establish mechanisms to consult the relevant airspace users and aerodrome operators on all major issues related to services provided, including on relevant changes to airspace configurations or strategic investments. Airspace users must also be involved in approving strategic investment plans.</p> <p>Furthermore, Article 38 of the proposal<sup>15</sup> requires that Member States, national supervisory authorities, European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) whether or not it acts as Performance Review Body (PRB) and the Network Manager establish mechanisms for consultation of stakeholders for the exercise of their tasks in the implementation of this Regulation.</p> <p>The Commission must also establish consultation mechanisms at Union level, also involving the Sectoral Dialogue Committee. The proposal also sets forth that the opinions of the Expert Group on the Human Dimension of the Single European Sky should be considered and taken into account.</p>
<p>1.6. There is concern that the ambition of this proposal is too broad, and therefore environmental measures should be given further thought and development outside this proposal. Such an additional policy should consider all relevant sustainability measures in aviation, including the introduction and integration of sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs). In these debates, the effectiveness of modulation of charges to incentivise environmental behaviour of airlines should be</p>	<p>The proposal requires that charges are modulated to encourage air navigation service providers, airports and airspace users to support improvements in environmental performance, or service quality such as increased use of sustainable alternative fuels, increased capacity, reduced delays and sustainable development, while maintaining an optimum safety level.</p> <p>This proposal relates to the Single</p>

<sup>15</sup> COM(2020) 579 final.

<p>assessed.</p>	<p>European Sky and, as such, treats environmental aspects linked to this subject. It is one out of a bundle of measures tackling decarbonisation of the transport sector, as highlighted in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy adopted on 9 December 2020.</p>
<p>1.8. The proposal is lacking in its consideration for the dramatic impact of COVID-19 on the industry. Specifically, the proposal's encouragement of structural change has the potential to create further fragmentation and greater complexity at a time when the industry needs stability to recover. Therefore, further study and consideration is needed to give adequate consideration to the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for both workers and service users. Additionally, the aim of the proposal to improve capacity in the ATM sector has become less relevant as traffic has reduced dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Current estimates from Eurocontrol show that a return to 2019 traffic is likely to take place in 2024<sup>16</sup>. The relevance of the proposal should therefore be considered.</p>	<p>Due consideration was given to the effect on capacity and air traffic levels caused by the COVID-19 crisis and such effect is analysed in the Staff Working Document accompanying the proposals.</p> <p>The Single European Sky reform is a structural reform involving changes to the sector but it will only fully apply after several years. It is important to adopt it now, so that all the necessary implementing and delegated acts can be adopted before the traffic returns to pre-crisis traffic levels , e.g. by 2024 according to Eurocontrol forecasts.</p> <p>The system must be made more resilient and flexible to respond to significant fluctuations in air traffic levels. In addition, lessons learnt of the crisis were integrated in the proposal, in particular with the possibility to adopt mechanisms to address unforeseeable and significant events which have an impact on the implementation of the performance and charging schemes. Therefore, this proposal is both timely and relevant.</p>
<p>1.9. In relation to the performance scheme, a top-down EASA led approach on performance review should take local conditions into account in a meaningful way.</p>	<p>The national supervisory authorities will assess the performance for terminal air navigation services because of their knowledge of local</p>

<sup>16</sup> Eurocontrol, Market Update [10 November 2020]. As presented by Eamonn Brennan at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VSQe97wDmc>>

	<p>circumstances.</p> <p>The Agency acting as PRB will assess the performance for <i>en route</i> air navigation services, given the cross border and network elements inherent in the provision of those services. However, the Agency acting as PRB will also consult extensively in the preparation of its work, ensuring that stakeholders' input including that of local actors are taken into account.</p> <p>The Agency acting as PRB and the National Supervisory Authority (NSA) will both assess performance plans submitted by the designated service providers themselves, which will provide for a bottom-up information stream.</p>
<p>1.10. The independence of a new economic regulator must be ensured and a clear demarcation between the regulation of and the application of services must be maintained. Therefore, the following amendments to the performance scheme should be made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the safety KPA should be developed at the same level as other KPA with EU metric targets and indicators,</li> <li>• mandatory consultation mechanisms should be introduced at local level to ensure appropriate involvement of staff representatives in the adoption of local performance plans.</li> <li>• [...]</li> </ul>	<p>The independence of PRB is guaranteed and its tasks are separated from the EASA safety-related tasks. Safety is removed as a target from the performance scheme because safety rules are already mandatory under Regulation (EU) 2018/1139. Safety is a pre-condition for operations. However, safety will continue to be monitored under the performance scheme. The establishment of consultation mechanisms, both at Union and local levels, is required under Article 38 of the amended recast proposal<sup>17</sup>.</p>
<p>1.11. It should be ensured that the structural separation of National Supervisory Authorities (NSAs) and National Competent Authorities (NCAs) avoids significant conflicts of interest, which could impact the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the</p>	<p>The purpose of separating NSAs from other public or private entities is precisely to ensure the absence of conflict of interest, and to reinforce their independence in terms of their organisation, functioning, legal</p>

<sup>17</sup> COM(2020) 579 final.

<p>industry, workers' lives and the safety of the industry. The NSAs and NCAs must act independently from any industry, economic, social or political pressure and therefore, in line with standards in Members States, they should remain in the remit of the public sector. Rules laying down the selection of processes for NSA and NCA staff should not be in contradiction with the usual selection processes for Member States' civil servants.</p>	<p>structure and decision-making (Article 3(3) of the amended proposal). Member States may however locate the NSA in a shared structure with other regulatory authorities, or with the national competition authorities, ensuring that independence requirements are met while reaping the benefits from setting up the NSA in an existing administrative structure in which expertise could be shared, thereby leveraging synergies and reducing administrative burden.</p> <p>Detailed rules laying down the modalities of the recruitment and selection procedures of NSA staff would be set out in an implementing act adopted with the examination procedure, therefore involving Member States.</p>
<p>1.14. During the legislative procedure, it is recommended that due consideration is given to certain aspects of this proposal, in particular any proposal to unbundle or liberalise service provision. It is recognised that these factors have the potential to have a detrimental impact on workers and social partners should therefore be engaged during this process.</p>	<p>The 2013 Impact Assessment on the initial SES2+ legislative proposal, which concluded that the preferred option was to fully unbundle certain air navigation services, included an analysis of the social impacts.</p> <p>The amended recast proposal deviates from the 2013 initial proposal by making de-coupling of those services voluntary. A study looking into possible social impacts of the Air Traffic Data Service Provision concept was carried out as part of the 'voluntary de-coupling' of certain air navigation services. Different stakeholders, including social partners participated in the related workshops.</p>
<p>2.3.1. Notably, the aviation industry has suffered most from the economic crash following the COVID-19 crisis. International estimates are for a return to 2019 traffic</p>	<p>These legislative proposals do not negatively impact recovery, and instead will help the air traffic management sector recover in the medium to longer</p>

<p>levels by 2024 at the earliest, provided that a COVID-19 vaccine is successfully introduced in the first half of 2021. Given the increasing pressure placed on the industry to recover some form of normal operations, the impact of this proposal must be fully understood, considering the significant structural amendments to the European ATM industry that it proposes. The proposal should not inhibit the ability of ATM or other sectors of aviation to restart normal operations.</p>	<p>term, by making the system more efficient, scalable and sustainable for future service provision. The fundamental changes would only fully come into effect after the time period necessary for the adoption of the relevant delegated and implementing acts. Ideally, the application of the new regime would start as from the fourth reference period in 2025.</p>
<p>2.3.3. The COVID-19 crisis has had a dramatic effect on the workforce in aviation, where tens of thousands of workers have already lost their jobs in Europe. The "support functions" of the ATM industry such as CNS, AIS, and MET might lead to further negative social consequences due to this proposal's efforts to unbundle services. This must be recognised, and the proposal should be cognizant of the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on these workers and the volatility of the sector in the current climate.</p>	<p>A voluntary decoupling of certain air navigation services is not expected to lead to negative social consequences. By the time the new rules come into effect, traffic levels are predicted to have recovered.</p> <p>The rules contained in the SES2+ amended proposal do not impose any particular service delivery model, nor a particular organisational model. Thus, Air Navigation Service Providers can choose the setup which best matches local economic, operational and social needs. Nor do those rules impose any change in staff working conditions. These will continue to be matters established at national level, including through methods involving social partners and social dialogue, as applicable.</p>
<p>2.4.1. [...]...Another aspect that may raise questions is the appeal body, which, in the proposed format, might not be totally independent from the PRB, even if the Commission's intention in this regard is quite clear, namely, the creation of a body that can solve cases through a non-judicial procedure, and not only at the European Court of Justice.</p>	<p>The Appeal Board for Performance Review is proposed to be composed of six members selected from among current or former senior staff of the NSAs, competition authorities or other Union or national institutions with relevant experience in the aviation sector. Their independence is guaranteed through the appointment procedure and other necessary features.</p>

	<p>The members of the Appeal Board are proposed by the Commission following an open public call for expression of interest and are appointed by the Management Board, after consulting the Regulatory Board for Performance Review.</p> <p>Appointment requires a positive vote from the representative of the Commission. The members must make a written declaration of commitments and absence of conflict of interest. The members must be independent in their decision-making and not perform any other duties in the Agency, its Management Board or in the Advisory Board for Performance Review.</p> <p>Such a set-up ensuring independence while locating the Appeal Board for Performance Review in the Agency replicates the set-up of appeal bodies in other regulatory Agencies, including in EASA.</p>
<p>2.5.1. Following the SES1 regulation, there is mandatory separation between supervisory and service provision roles, at least at function level. Consideration should be given to this amendment in SES2+, as experience built through the functional separation processes has shown that performance can be maintained at the same level as a sector that is structurally separated. Likewise, further clarity would be welcome on the overall scope of the proposal in this regard.</p>	<p>Functional separation of supervisory from service provision roles has been established in the existing acquis regarding the Single European Sky. However, it has become clear that the independence and capacity of NSAs need to be strengthened, a point equally underlined in the Special Report of the Court of Auditors on the Single European Sky.</p> <p>A regime with complete legal and structural separation ensures full independence, adequate capacity and avoids conflicts of interest, which is the overall objective of Article 3 of the amended proposal.</p>

<p><b>N° 6 Fisheries – transposition of IATTC measures</b>  <b>COM(2020) 308 final</b>  <b>EESC 2020/4492 - NAT/799</b>  <b>556<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – December 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Francisco Javier GARAT PEREZ (ES-III)</b>  <b>DG MARE – Commissioner SINKEVICIUS</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1.1. The EESC is of the view that control, conservation and management measures adopted by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) need to be transposed into EU law, the aim being to ensure that they are uniformly and effectively implemented within the EU. The transposition should adhere strictly to what has been agreed in the IATTC, without imposing any new obligations on European vessels. The Committee therefore supports the proposal for a regulation.</p>	<p>The Commission thanks the Committee for its support and shares the Committee’s view.</p> <p>There are no elements in this transposition requiring the adoption of provisions beyond what has been agreed in the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC).</p>
<p>3.2. However, in the Committee's view, bearing in mind that the IATTC frequently amends its conservation and control measures at its annual meetings, the proposal does not establish an efficient mechanism for transposing the measures adopted by the IATTC or for updating them.</p> <p>3.3. The EESC believes that the most efficient mechanism for regularly updating the rules adopted by the IATTC would be to draft a simple regulation, clearly explaining the need for regular updates of measures concerning at least the competences allocated and containing a single article summarising the European Union's firm commitment to apply without fail the rules adopted annually by the IATTC to its fleet.</p>	<p>The Commission notes the Committee’s view on this point. The Commission is in favour of simpler transposition methods.</p> <p>However, it is not possible to transpose the IATTC resolutions in one single article. The IATTC resolutions are addressed to the IATTC members. Therefore, the provisions contained in those resolutions cannot be applied as such, for example by European Union individuals referred to in those obligations as the scope of their duties would be uncertain.</p> <p>EU Regulations must spell out clearly how norms are to be applied within the Union, by either Member States, operators, or the Commission. We need clear identification of subjects and their</p>

<p>3.4. Otherwise, the EESC warns that there is a risk of a permanent mismatch between IATTC rules and the legislation published by the EU, something that could generate a high degree of legal uncertainty.</p>	<p>rights and duties, in order to ensure the transposition of these international obligations.</p> <p>This also ensures that all key rules are available to operators in their language. Finally, to avoid legal uncertainty we need simpler transposition methods.</p> <p>Regarding the possibility of a legal uncertainty due to the 'permanent mismatch' between the adoption of the IATTC provisions and its transposition, resolutions adopted by the IATTC are binding upon the EU and its Member States, with or without transposition.</p> <p>While the Commission shares the Committee's concerns about the need for timely transpositions, there should be no legal uncertainty. Furthermore, the Commission is not aware of any instances where the EU transposition calendar has in practice led to confusion in the application of the IATTC resolutions.</p>
<p>1.5. The EESC stresses the risk involved in introducing a system of delegated acts, as this would give the Commission the power to legislate without being required to follow the ordinary procedures.</p>	<p>The Commission's intention is to find a way to simplify and speed-up the transposition exercise. As a result, the Commission introduces a mechanism by which non-essential and more technical parts of the regulation could be amended by delegation. The provisions concerned by this mechanism are clearly identified in the regulation. The European Parliament and the Council are involved in the drafting of delegated regulation via experts groups. The delegation is revocable and time-barred.</p>

<p><b>N° 7      Cross-border payments/Codification</b>  <b>COM(2020) 323 final</b>  <b>EESC 2020/4216 - INT/914</b>  <b>556<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – December 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Gonçalo LOBO XAVIER (PT-I)</b>  <b>LS – President VON DER LEYEN</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1.3. Concerning the submission and covering period of this report aimed at evaluating several aspects of the impact of the proposal for a Regulation, the EESC agrees with the fact that it should be submitted on 19 April 2022 at the latest and cover at least the period from 15 December 2019 to 19 October 2021.</p> <p>1.4. In the spirit of codification and given that the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission have agreed, by an interinstitutional agreement dated 20 December 1994, that an accelerated procedure may be used for the fast-track adoption of codification instruments (since no changes of substance may be made to the instruments affected by codification), the EESC fully endorses 20 April 2021 as the date of entering into force of the current Regulation.</p>	<p>The Commission confirms that the proposal contains a straightforward codification of existing legal texts, without any change in their substance.</p>

<p><b>N°8 Industrial transition towards a green and digital European economy</b>  <b>EESC 2020/3642 - INT/913</b>  <b>556<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session – December 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur-general: Lucie STUDNICNA (CZ-II)</b>  <b>DG GROW – Commissioner BRETON</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>2.5. The term that has emerged in this context in relation to environmental and technological change is "just transition". The EESC sees just transition as a core component of both the budget and recovery plan pushing for a greener European economy. It is therefore necessary to develop a wider understanding of a just transition (beyond carbon-based economies) that fully implements the European Pillar of Social Rights , based on a new social contract, while driving reform in relation to redistributive systems, work-life balance and gender equality. Particularly important in relation to implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights are high-quality jobs for all, access to high-quality education and training, including the right to lifelong learning, especially for vulnerable groups, equal access to healthcare and social services for all, social protection, and inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as the long-term unemployed, women, young people, migrants or people with disabilities. All these important goals can be achieved on the basis of a prospering economy, new, highly qualified jobs offered by employers</p>	<p>Based on a broad consultation initiated by the Commission Communication on a Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions of 14 January 2020<sup>18</sup>, on 4 March the Commission adopted The European Pillar of Social Rights action plan. This is the Commission’s main contribution to the Porto Social Summit hosted by the Portuguese Council Presidency in May 2021.</p> <p>The action plan sets out a number of EU-level actions in the areas of more and better jobs, skills and equality and social protection and inclusion, building on the many actions taken since the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in November 2017 in Gothenburg. It also delivers on disability with the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.</p> <p>The Commission has also put forward ambitious strategies for a Union of Equality, with which synergies will be created to give equal opportunities to all<sup>19</sup>.</p>

<sup>18</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/860460/Strong\\_Social\\_Europe\\_Communication\\_and\\_Annex.pdf.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/860460/Strong_Social_Europe_Communication_and_Annex.pdf.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (COM(2020) 152 final) of 5 March 2020. The EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025 (COM (2020) 565 final) of 18 September 2020. The EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030 (COM(2020) 620 final) of 7 October 2020. The Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (COM(2020) 758 final) of 24 November 2020. The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (COM(2020) 698 final) of 12 November 2020. The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (COM(2021) 101 final) of 3 March 2021.

<p>and the necessary investment in new technologies.</p>	<p>The Commission proposed three EU headline targets to be achieved by the end of the decade in the areas of employment, skills, and social protection, consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Complementing the EU's political goals set for the green and digital transitions, social targets will help focus policy efforts on reaching results and constitute an important incentive for reform and investment in the Member States. The headline targets have been welcome by Heads of State, the European Parliament, social partners and civil society during the Porto Social Summit.</p> <p>Delivering on the European Social Pillar is a shared political commitment and responsibility of the EU institutions, national authorities, social partners and civil society, all having a role to play in line with their competences. The action plan encourages all the relevant actors to make best use of the instruments available to accelerate the implementation of the European Social Pillar, in particular the new Multiannual Financial Framework and the NextGenerationEU.</p>
<p>2.6. Countries and regions in industrial transition typically face challenges in modernising their industrial base, upgrading the skills of the workforce, compensating for job losses in key sectors and raising the low productivity that limits income growth. Overall, they would benefit from greening and technological progress and related</p>	<p>The Just Transition Fund<sup>20</sup>, endowed with €17.5 billion, has been set up to financially support territories most negatively affected by the social and economic impacts of the transition to climate neutrality. Together with the InvestEU Just Transition Scheme and the Public Sector Loan Facility (with</p>

<sup>20</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/actions-being-taken-eu/just-transition-mechanism/just-transition-funding-sources\\_en#:~:text=%20Just%20Transition%20funding%20sources%20%201%20The,The%20EIB%20loan%20facility%20is%20the...%20More%20](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/actions-being-taken-eu/just-transition-mechanism/just-transition-funding-sources_en#:~:text=%20Just%20Transition%20funding%20sources%20%201%20The,The%20EIB%20loan%20facility%20is%20the...%20More%20)

developments, yet some places and certain population groups, in particular vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly, Roma and migrants, risk being left behind. Addressing the challenges associated with long-term transformations requires anticipation of change and active transition management on the part of policy-makers, the social partners, civil society organisations and key stakeholders in these countries and regions. Social dialogue, information, consultation and participation of workers and their representative organisations, including in decision-making bodies (boards and supervisory boards) play a key role in addressing and influencing company decision-making so as to manage transitions in a forward-looking way. The EESC urges the Commission to strengthen and develop the social dimension in the future updated industrial strategy.

the European Investment Bank) it is part of the Just Transition Mechanism.

A major feature of action towards a socially fair transition is the development of appropriate skills, so that workers become and remain able to play an active role in the changing in the labour market. The European Skills Agenda launched in July 2020 calls for national skills intelligence mechanisms and comprehensive skills strategies to steer lifelong skills development, to be provided in particular through flexible modules of vocational education and training.

The lack of digital skills in Europe is an important and multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive answer involving all interested stakeholders.

The EU-wide Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition collects commitments from companies, social partners, non-profit organisations and education providers to take action to provide people in Europe with digital skills. It supports actions to promote digital skills to enable all citizens, including the most vulnerable, to be active in our digital society, as well as specific actions for the labour force and for promoting digital skills in a lifelong learning perspective

This critical challenge will also benefit from important funding from the new Digital Europe Programme as well as the European Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Furthermore the European Accessibility Act contributes to ensure accessibility of products and services in

the EU fostering industry inclusive response.

Social aspects of Europe's industrial transformation will remain an important part of the industrial strategy. The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that many opportunities exist for integrating different stakeholders, perspectives and assets to achieve broader (system-wide) value-driving initiatives that address societal challenges while also fostering innovation and industrial competitiveness.

The European Commission promotes the concept of "Shared Value" that reflects the need of all clusters to undertake activities which contribute to addressing social and environmental problems of local communities. It refers to the notion of 'social glue' and mutual learning where financial, human and tangible resources are pooled together to enable joint project development. Clusters can provide an ideal ground for identifying and implementing such shared value projects based on their strength of connecting different stakeholders in the value chain and of providing interdisciplinary leadership.

Social Economy organisations are also organised in industrial clusters, although often less known. A specific Commission Expert Group on the social business initiative (*Groupe d'experts de la Commission sur l'entrepreneuriat social* - GECES) studying this phenomenon has labelled them as "Clusters of social and ecological innovation". Policymakers need to promote them to complement

	<p>efforts to meet specific societal challenges such as work integration, inclusive education or circular economy ambitions.</p>
<p>2.8. Digitalisation and the internet economy have also resulted in the emergence of new forms of work, like platform work, where workers are without any social and job security and often work under very precarious conditions and with unclear status. Their working conditions and status need to be harmonised at European level to encourage fair mobility and integration in the internal market. To this end, the EESC sees the need to create legal certainty for workers by defining a legal status for labour in the digital platform economy. Low or no access to social protection incurs a cost, not only for the workers themselves but also for social security systems.</p>	<p>Platform work is often associated with precarious working conditions, reflected in lack of transparency and predictability of contractual arrangements, health and safety challenges, and inadequate access to social protection. The employment status of people providing services through platforms influences all these challenges, as the majority of them are classified as self-employed.</p> <p>To ensure dignified, transparent and predictable working conditions, the Commission will present by the end of 2021 a proposal to improve the working conditions of people providing services through platforms and ensure adequate social protection in platform work. As a first step, the Commission run a social partners' consultation from 24 February to 7 April 2021, under the understanding that the initiative could be legislative in nature. A second social partners' consultation will follow.</p> <p>On 5 March, the Commission also launched a public consultation to gather evidence as part of an initiative to ensure that EU competition law does not stand in the way of collective agreements that aim to improve the working conditions of solo self-employed in a situation of bargaining imbalance.</p>
<p>2.9. The digital transformation also entails potential risks in fields such as financial stability, financial crime and consumer protection. These risks may further increase</p>	<p>Work is ongoing at the G20 and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) level to find a global solution that can</p>

due to the fragmented regulatory landscape in the EU, and uneven global developments in regulating the sector. The EESC therefore sees a need for the EU to create a comprehensive and stable regulatory framework in this area. It also recommends that the EU resume its initiative on taxing large digital companies.

support a reform of the international corporate tax framework in order to address some of the challenges related to the digitalisation of the economy.

The Commission remains committed to working towards a consensus-based solution at OECD/G20 level. In this context, it is also important to consider the mandate received from the European Council to propose a digital levy in the first Semester of 2021. The Commission services are exploring various options, regarding the possible design of such a levy. To this end, a public consultation on such levy was launched from 18 January 2021 to 12 April 2021.

The digital transformation creates opportunities but at the same time, it poses challenges to European consumers. Therefore, it has been addressed as one of the priority areas in the New Consumer Agenda<sup>21</sup> published on 13 November 2020.

As an example of the challenges, the surge in mass-marketing scams and activities of rogue traders linked to the COVID-19 pandemic tested the capabilities of national enforcement authorities of the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) network. The Commission activated the CPC network early in the pandemic and initiated a dialogue with major online platforms to effectively prevent online consumer scams that could cause mass harm to European consumers.

Competent authorities with the steering of the Commission build on the recent experience and elevate cooperation

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<sup>21</sup> COM(2020) 696 final.

with other relevant networks of law enforcement authorities, domain registries and other key stakeholders. Boosting cooperation and preparedness for future mass-harm practices will help facing the challenges of the digital transformation.

With the Digital Services Act (DSA)<sup>22</sup> and the Digital Markets Acts (DMA)<sup>23</sup>, the Commission has proposed new landmark legislation for providing digital services and ensuring fair and contestable digital markets in Europe. The DSA establishes a clear responsibility framework for online platforms that (e.g. through the ‘Know your business customer’ and ‘Compliance by design’ principles) will considerably reduce the risk of online scams for consumers and contribute to better law compliance and safe products online. With its clear list of dos and don’ts for so-called ‘gatekeeper platforms’, the DMA will lead to fairer and more open digital markets with more choice and better prices for consumers.

The guiding vision of the Digital Decade Communication is working towards a successful digital transformation by 2030. The digital transformation will be based on the empowerment of citizens and technological leadership.

A framework of digital principles will be put place for empowering people in the digital online world, so they can benefit from the digital transformation.

The digital principles stresses the importance of taking human-centred

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<sup>22</sup> COM(2020) 825 final.

<sup>23</sup> COM(2020) 842 final.

	<p>approach to digitalisation. Technologies and platforms must respect rights and values, also when we are online and to have access to fair and non-discriminatory online services. In addition to the efforts on domestic front, the Commission is also advocating for global rules on consumer protection in the context of WTO e-commerce negotiations in Geneva.</p>
<p>2.10. Workers have to be enabled to adequately prepare themselves for the labour market, and economic changes that are already under way will be fundamental for the growth of industry and Europe's broader economic success. New and higher skills, including for blue-collar workers, present a challenge to apprenticeship systems. Higher skills require more vocational training in tertiary education institutions. In contrast to the best designed initial apprenticeship systems, the lack of national frameworks and quality control are issues, as is progression from initial apprenticeships to tertiary education. The future will require cooperation and innovation from both civil society and governments at all levels to create the level playing-field called for by the organisations represented in the EESC.</p>	<p>The Commission acknowledges the need to better match skills demand and offer on today's labour market, especially as regards digital skills.</p> <p>The Commission has set ambitious targets as concerns the share of adults (those aged 16-74) with at least basic digital skills: 70% by 2025, as set in the 2020 the European Skills Agenda, and 80% by 2030 as envisaged by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan of March 2021. To achieve these targets, the Commission has launched a number of initiatives such as a recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (VET), Information Communication Technologies Jump-Start trainings, the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027.</p> <p>To promote advanced digital skills, the Digital Europe Programme will support the design and delivery of specialized programmes and traineeships for future experts in key capacity areas and support the upskilling of the existing workforce through short trainings.</p> <p>To ensure that upskilling and reskilling of workers is in line with labour market needs, the Pact for Skills, the flagship</p>

	<p>action of the European Skills Agenda, is promoting huge skills partnerships, gathering all relevant stakeholders in a whole industrial ecosystem, from large and small companies to education and training providers to unions and civil society organisations, and more.</p>
<p>2.11. The EESC notes that digital technology and artificial intelligence applications should be human-centred and benefit our society as a whole and supports a regulatory framework for artificial intelligence. The green and digital transitions should not be resisted, and the EU should promote the development of AI systems geared to specific applications to accelerate the ecological and climate transitions.</p>	<p>The Commission supports the acceleration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) development and deployment for good and for all as stated in the Communication ‘Artificial Intelligence for Europe’<sup>24</sup>, setting the foundation of all the subsequent initiatives.</p> <p>The Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence 2021 Review<sup>25</sup> developed together with Member States aims to align EU action on AI more closely with the European Green Deal priorities. Specifically, environment is one of the key sectoral action areas identified in the Coordinated Plan where the EU can build strategic leadership on AI. Actions supporting “greener AI” and “AI serving the Green Deal” are planned in the funding programmes, Horizon Europe and the Digital Europe Programme.</p> <p>The Commission agrees that a human-centred approach is key to digital transformation in general and artificial intelligence in particular.</p> <p>On top of that, as announced in the White Paper on Artificial Intelligence of 19 February 2020<sup>26</sup>, the Commission proposed on 21 April 2021 a regulatory framework<sup>27</sup> establishing requirements</p>

<sup>24</sup> COM/2018/237 final

<sup>25</sup> COM(2021) 205

<sup>26</sup> COM(2020) 65 final.

<sup>27</sup> COM(2021) 206 final.

	<p>for high-risk artificial intelligence systems.</p> <p>The Commission also highlights that developers and deployers of artificial intelligence are already subject to European legislation on fundamental rights, data protection or consumer protection etc.</p>
<p>3.1. There will be substantial innovation needs: from the creation and acceleration of new low-carbon production processes (many of which necessitate fundamentally different modes of design and production, in addition to novel feedstocks and/or core industrial processes) to innovation not only in the more circular value chains of basic materials industries but also in the energy systems that power them. Furthermore, the most promising low-carbon technologies will need to prove industrial scale. This will require rapid policy support to introduce and drive the scale-up of new low-carbon production routes and uses of materials by 2030 at the latest.</p>	<p>An important part of the Commission’s vision for a sustainable Europe is to not only focus on new processes, but also improve the efficiency of existing ones.</p> <p>A particular problem is the increasing electronic waste generated in Europe, with only 42% of it being recycled.</p> <p>To address this situation, the Commission will adopt a ‘Circular Electronics Initiative’ that will propose ways to extend the lifespan of electronic devices, to reduce waste, conserve resources and protect the environment.</p>
<p>3.2. The transformations needed to achieve a just transition across the EU will require a shared framework to mobilise governments, businesses and civil society around targeted problem-solving. Social innovation has a major role to play in this process. For that matter, an important step might be to create an inter-sectoral EU strategy on social innovation, give greater recognition to social economy players, and test and perhaps use their business models. This would help develop an ecosystem for subsidised experimentation at EU, national, regional, and local levels.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the importance of mobilising governments, businesses and civil society together.</p> <p>The Commission is very active on promoting and developing social economy and deploying new engagement and partnerships models in regional areas. For instance, the European Social Economy Regions raise awareness and boost setting up social economy stakeholders’ networks and partnerships at regional and local level. Greater recognition must be given to social economy players. This aspect will be covered in particular in the forthcoming action plan on Social Economy, foreseen for the last quarter</p>

	<p>of 2021.</p> <p>The action plan will foster the development of a favourable policy environment for social economy, social enterprises and social innovation in the longer term. In addition, it will illustrate how other European businesses can be more anchored locally and achieve social impact.</p> <p>Concrete actions are already planned under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) to promote and to support the dissemination and upscaling of social innovations, for example a higher EU co-funding rate, new national competence centres for social innovation and a new EU level initiative or platform to boost transnational exchanges, peer learning, multiplying, scaling and diffusion of social innovation (indirect management).</p>
<p>4.3. Social economy enterprises and organisations, actors in a sector that has proven great resilience and contributed to mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, are predominantly active in areas that are impacted by the digital and green transitions. As such, the promotion of their operations and social innovation processes needs to be ensured.</p>	<p>The Proximity and Social Economy ecosystem is one of the 14 industrial ecosystems identified in the Commission recovery plan for Europe.</p> <p>The Commission plans to analyse in more details the ecosystem as part of the update of EU industry strategy. The promotion of their activities will be in particular highlighted in the forthcoming action plan on Social Economy (last quarter 2021).</p>
<p>6.2. One of the key governance arrangements for implementing and monitoring the progress of socially just transitions is the European semester. It is of the utmost importance to provide constant evaluation of European and national policies at the social, economic and environmental levels. The European semester has gradually</p>	<p>The European Semester was the EU's response to the weaknesses in the EU's economic governance revealed during the financial and economic crisis. Since then, the process has been regularly reviewed and further developed to tackle socioeconomic issues, including productivity and competitiveness and</p>

developed a more social dimension, but its macroeconomic and fiscal dimensions still predominate. The EESC therefore proposes incorporating into the European semester new, improved, measurable and complementary social, economic and environmental indicators to monitor and keep track of all aspects of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its principles, as well as the 17 SDGs, creating synergies with the social scoreboard by introducing the concept of a sustainable well-being economy for all, together with targeted social and environmental Country Specific Recommendations . The semester has now also been redesigned to provide for more action to support the recovery, which the EESC hopes can also help to renew the entire EU governance mechanism and make it function as a guiding force for the survival of democracy as well as upward convergence within the EU.

the business environment, as well as the economic and social aspects of broader challenges related to climate, energy and sustainability.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission has tailored the European Semester process to the health, social and economic crisis at hand while keeping a strong emphasis on the post crisis recovery.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) will provide support to reforms and investments undertaken by Member States, helping Member States to support the recovery as well as to strengthen health, economic, social and institutional resilience.

The RRF Regulation foresees that the Commission should establish a dedicated scoreboard providing information on progress in the implementation of the RRF and national plans. The Commission should also set out a list of common indicators to be used for reporting on progress and for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation of the RRF. The Scoreboard should be operational by December 2021.

Under the RRF, the Commission strongly encourages Member States to include in their plans investments and reforms in Flagship areas, including in the “Reskill and Upskill” Flagship to support digital skills and educational and vocational training for all age groups, hence promoting convergence within the EU and a social and just transition.

The European Semester is the confirmed framework to identify

national reform priorities and monitor their implementation, including the monitoring of progress in implementing the national recovery and resilience plans. The European Commission has already reinforced its administrative and analytical capacities to ensure policy coherence, as well as effective coordination and monitoring of the national recovery and resilience plans within the European Semester framework.

With a stronger focus on environmental sustainability in the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020 and 2021, the European Semester is reinforced as an encompassing tool for economic and social policymaking, also through integration of the Sustainable Development Goals, to contribute to the European Green Deal and to help us to advance towards meeting environmental and climate related objectives.

There is a need to connect the impact of environmental (and social) trends to the actual and potential economic performance, and to further develop the analysis of the appropriate policies for greening our economies.

The development of a set of indicators covering environmental issues that analysts and policymakers could refer to may indeed be of assistance, for example along the lines of the current Social Scoreboard. This could be multi-dimensional, incorporating climate, biodiversity, resource and pollution aspects, for example building on the existing Eurostat indicators on the Single Digital Goals.

The Commission's European Pillar of

	<p>Social Rights Action Plan of 4 March 2021 confirms the key role of the European Semester for monitoring and implementing the European Social Pillar.</p> <p>The action plan is accompanied by a proposal for an update of the Social Scoreboard and its headline and secondary indicators, to ensure a better alignment between the Scoreboard indicators, the new 2030 headline targets, the twenty Pillar principles and the Commission's current political priorities. This will allow a better monitoring of progress on all the relevant dimensions, targets and initiatives put forward under the action plan.</p>
<p>6.3. A comprehensive analysis of synergies and trade-offs between the objectives, initiatives and recommendations proposed by the EU in the various policy areas of the semester would require a high degree of policy integration, coherence and coordination between the various institutional actors responsible for economic, social and environmental policies, and an improvement in their analytical capacities.</p>	<p>The Commission presented a review of the effectiveness of the economic and fiscal surveillance framework and launched a public debate on its future, hence providing an opportunity to both institutional actors responsible for economic, social and environmental policies and stakeholders to express their views.</p> <p>Originally, citizens and institutions were invited to submit their responses to the questions put forward in the Communication by 30 June 2020. However, the public debate on the future of the economic surveillance framework has been impacted by the need to focus on the immediate challenges of the coronavirus crisis. Therefore, the period of public consultation has been extended and the Commission will actively return to the review exercise when the immediate challenges have been addressed.</p>

6.4. In addition, to offset the institutional imbalance in economic and social governance, the EESC recommends using a "golden rule" when applying the EU's fiscal rules exempting public investment from deficit calculations and taking into account the sustainability of existing debt levels, in order to guarantee a modern healthcare, ecological, education and technological infrastructure and avoid an unprecedented recession .

The Commission Communication of 5 February 2020 on the Economic governance review<sup>28</sup> – addressed to the Committee – raised nine issues for discussion, so as to launch a public debate on the future evolution of the economic and fiscal framework. This debate was put on hold following the emergency caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. One prominent question raised by the review was: What is the appropriate role for the EU surveillance framework in incentivising Member States to undertake key reforms and investments needed to help tackle today and tomorrow's economic, social, and environmental challenges while preserving safeguards against risks to debt sustainability?

The Commission is continuing to reflect on this complex question, which is even more relevant following the COVID-19 outbreak. The sustainability of existing debt levels, much increased due to the COVID-19 crisis, would be a related challenge.

These issues will need to be addressed again once the public debate on economic governance is resumed, i.e. once the epidemiological and economic situation allows. For now, the activation of the General Escape Clause, which suspends the business-as-usual requirement of the Stability and Growth Pact, gives to Member States the full flexibility needed to concentrate on combating the COVID-19 crisis and support the recovery.

The framework should be consistent with today and tomorrow's challenges.

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<sup>28</sup> COM(2020) 55 final

	<p>It needs to be discussed which is the appropriate role of the EU surveillance in helping to promote public finances conducive to sustainable growth and Member States sustaining an adequate level of investment.</p> <p>In particular, significant investment will be required to meet the broader ambition of the European Green Deal and Digital transition. This raises the question of the extent to which the fiscal framework can support the reforms and investments, including in human capital and skills, needed for the transition to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient, and competitive economy fit for the digital age, in a manner that leaves no one behind.</p> <p>This includes re-assessing the appropriateness of the current flexibility clauses in terms of their scope and eligibility, in order to facilitate the right type and level of investment while preserving debt sustainability.</p> <p>In addition, thought should be given to the role of the fiscal framework in greening national budgets.</p>
<p>8.1. The role of the regions in the transition process should be strengthened in the European agenda. The involvement of regional administrations could contribute to the creation of the necessary eco-systems for a successful transition. Long-term planning, a strong place-based approach, smart specialisation and a human capital agenda have been mentioned as the prerequisites for this process.</p>	<p>With its integrated, place-based approach and smart specialisation, cohesion policy is the main EU policy instrument to address structural changes linked to the industrial transition of Europe's regions and cities.</p> <p>The Commission encourages the regions to embed in their smart specialisation strategies all actions to help boost their innovation capacity, remove investment barriers, equip citizens with the right skills and prepare for industrial and societal change.</p>

In this context - in the 2021-2027 programming period - smart specialisation strategies will be further enhanced. Around €80 billion out of €200 billion of the European Regional Development Fund envelope will be concentrated on the policy objective “A Smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation”. Actions to support industrial transition, where relevant, are part of the fulfilment criteria for the enabling condition linked to this policy objective, i.e. the good governance of national or regional smart specialisation strategy.

Within the Just Transition Fund and in line with the partnership principle, Member States will prepare Territorial Just Transition Plans, providing an outline of the transition process to a climate neutral economy and identifying subsequently the most impacted territories that should be supported. These plans will set out for each concerned territory the social, economic and environmental challenges and give details on needs for economic diversification, reskilling and environmental rehabilitation as appropriate.

In addition, the Commission promotes the regional and local dimension of economic development through supporting cluster development. They can contribute to identifying business trends and emerging activities often occurring at the cross-roads of different but connected sectors.

Clusters are well-positioned to create synergies and develop cooperation between them and the Small and

	<p>Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) and employers' organisations, and sectoral and trade associations. This should facilitate a broader outreach to SMEs across Europe and encourage their involvement in cluster activities. This is particularly relevant for SMEs which operate in geographical locations where cluster organisations are less developed. Moreover, some SMEs have an activity not covered by clusters.</p>
<p>8.2. Several regions in Europe – especially the coal and steel regions – have already undergone transition for either economic or climate agenda reasons. The main precondition for successful transition is an inclusive, anticipatory approach to ensure people have a decent future. This includes the design of a realistic roadmap, creation of the necessary research infrastructure and provision of technological, innovation, academic and educational facilities, together with the necessary funding. To ensure appropriate funding, European instruments planned to support these regions (e.g. the European Just Transition Fund) should not be replacing national efforts.</p>	<p>The Commission is very much aware of the fact that EU resources mobilised under the Just Transition Mechanism, albeit significant, will not cover all expenses related to the transition. A combination with other EU tools (e.g. through Cohesion Funds, the Innovation and Modernisation Funds or the Recovery and Resilience Facility), national resources, and even more so, private investments, will be key to ensure a planned, orderly and just transition.</p> <p>The Commission is strongly committed to continue providing tangible support, through funding, financing, technical assistance and platforms to share experience and knowledge, to EU coal and carbon-intensive regions, acting wherever European added-value can be found.</p>
<p>9.3. The EESC calls on the Council and the European Parliament to increase and allocate sufficient funding for investment needs in the MFF 2021-2027 to deliver a real and radical green and digital transition. To achieve sufficient funding, the EESC also advocates broadening the range of own resources, possibly to include a digital</p>	<p>The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is an unprecedented opportunity for EU Member States to accelerate both their green and digital transition. Under the RRF, each National Recovery and Resilience Plan will earmark a minimum level of 20% of expenditure for digital and 37% for</p>

<p>services tax, Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base, and a financial transactions tax</p>	<p>green, allowing massive investments to modernise and digitalise our economy and society at all levels.</p>
<p>10.1. Because industrial transition often requires a shift from old and traditional manufacturing industries to future-oriented activities (even in traditional sectors), it can lead to higher than average unemployment (at least temporarily) due to locally concentrated deindustrialisation and to the skills base being in declining sectors. Anticipation and involvement of workers' representatives at branch and enterprise level and before decisions are taken is fundamental. It is crucial that policies to address industrial transition help workers and local communities, especially workers with disabilities and other workers from vulnerable groups, manage the transition with the least possible disruption while maximising potential benefits.</p>	<p>Structural shifts in the economy, including the green and digital transitions, can lead to (temporary) labour market imbalances and unemployment, which may be concentrated in specific regions. In view of major economic shifts, companies should anticipate change and mitigate the employment and social effects of restructuring operations. Social dialogue at all levels has a crucial role in ensuring that these transitions are managed fairly.</p> <p>The European Skills Agenda envisages the establishment in all Member States of skills intelligence mechanisms at national, regional and sectoral level. Implemented with the participation of social partners, aims to ensure that skills are fit for jobs and to help people build skills throughout their lives.</p> <p>The Union of Equality – Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030<sup>29</sup>, adopted on 3 March, includes targeted actions to support workers developing new skills for new jobs. The Commission will also present measures to improve labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities. The Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, in particular the ESF+ and the Just Transition Fund, will include measures to support workers in vulnerable situations, inter alia those with disabilities affected by industrial transitions.</p>

<sup>29</sup> COM(2021) 101 final

10.2.1. Successfully transitioning into the work of the future requires tailoring employment and skills development policies to local labour market conditions. At the same time, the supply of skills needs to be matched with skills demand. Better anticipating the future set of skills needs and an appropriate supply, by retraining and upskilling workers, including through access to lifelong learning, needs to be combined with policies that stimulate investment in new sources of employment and productivity growth.

The skills intelligence mechanisms envisaged by the European Skills Agenda should be the basis for comprehensive national skills strategies and for action by public and private employment services, ensuring a better match between the skills supplied through initial and continuing education and training and the needs of the labour market. Skills play a major role in promoting workers' productivity, particularly if they are combined with investments in research and development, high-quality, innovative capital stocks and effective institutions<sup>30</sup>.

Furthermore, the latest Digital Economy and Society Index report estimates that 33% of workers do not have at least basic digital skills whereas most jobs require today some level of digital competences. The Commission aims to close this digital skills gap with a number of specific actions to support digital skills for all and train more ICT experts.

The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan proposes that by 2030, at least 80% of all adults should have basic digital skills.

The Digital Compass for 2030 (Digital Decade Communication) reinforces this ambition by setting it as target for 2030. In addition, there should be 20 million employed ICT specialists in the EU, compared to 7.8 million in 2019 – while more women should take up such jobs.

The Commission coordinates the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition

<sup>30</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23707&langId=en>

	<p>bringing together Member States, companies, social partners, non-profit organisations and education providers, who take action to tackle the lack of digital skills in Europe. In addition, the European Digital Skills and Jobs Platform will serve as a one-stop-shop for digital skills' training opportunities, best practices and skills information in Europe.</p>
<p>10.2.2. The EESC notes that supporting people with training in the just digital and green transitions starts with validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) and with ensuring the recognition and certification of training courses allowing NFIL to be a full part of a person's qualifications.</p>	<p>The evaluation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>31</sup>, published together with the European Skills Agenda, concludes that it is necessary to ensure that everybody has access to opportunities to get their skill validated. It notes the relevance of micro-credentials – on which the European Skills Agenda announces a European approach – for the recognition of validated skills.</p>
<p>10.3. The Skills Agenda should pay more attention to the development of key competences during mandatory education cycles/curricula, and to learning for young people and adults.</p>	<p>The European Skills Agenda, building upon the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, explicitly calls for investment in education and training systems to ensure that people are equipped with the key competences needed in the labour market and in society.</p>
<p>10.4. The Commission has published a Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027). This should be a cross-cutting strategy that could also increase the strategic importance of education and training among policy fields at European level.</p>	<p>The Digital Education Action Plan outlines a co-ordinated, comprehensive and ambitious long-term vision for European Digital Education. It proposes a set of measures that will foster the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem as well as enhance basic and advanced</p>

<sup>31</sup> SWD(2020) 121 final

	<p>digital skills and competences for the digital transformation. By boosting digital skills and competences and promoting a deeper understanding of advanced technology it will help support the industrial transition towards a digital European economy and increase the strategic importance of digital education across all relevant policy areas.</p>
<p>10.5.1. The EESC suggests that the Commission should reassess the adequacy of the relevant EU labour law acquis, strengthening it to better support a just transition for workers.</p>	<p>The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a reflection frame for the continuous assessment and adaptation of the EU labour law acquis in view of the future of work. As an example, the Commission committed in its Work Programme for 2021 to present a new EU strategic framework on health and safety at work, drawing lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and against the backdrop of the changing world of work.</p>
<p>10.5.2. The right to safety and health is a fundamental workplace right for all workers, regardless of their employment relationship or the kind of business model within which they work. The EESC is very concerned that some new types of work created by the climate and digital transitions could fall outside the scope of occupational safety and health (OSH) provisions. Additionally, significant risks have already been demonstrated across digitalised workplaces, such as work intensification, stress and psychosocial violence, and in the future we can expect to see accidents caused by Artificial Intelligence, accidents that we need to prevent. The EESC therefore calls for all workers in the EU to be protected by OSH legislation.</p>	<p>Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work (the Framework Directive) and its individual and related Directives aim to provide a high level of protection against work safety and health risks, including psychosocial ones, to EU workers in all sectors.</p> <p>As for self-employed workers, the Council recommendation 2003/134/EC concerning the improvement of the protection of the health and safety at work of self-employed workers recommended that Member States promote health and safety for self-employed workers, and when doing so, choose the measures they deem to be</p>

	<p>most appropriate (legislation, information campaigns etc.).</p> <p>Concerning Artificial Intelligence, any new or amended provisions in other EU legislation should not have a negative impact on occupational safety and health (OSH), and should not hinder the effectiveness of the existing EU OSH legislation under Article 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. In this respect, the revision of the Machinery Directive 2006/42/EC intends to take into account the risks stemming from new technologies, including artificial intelligence and aspects such as the interaction between humans and the new generation of machines.</p>
<p>10.5.3. The EESC encourages the European Commission to regularly review the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and related regulations in the light of technological developments.</p>	<p>In the evaluation of the first two years of application of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)<sup>32</sup>, the Commission referred to the fact that “the GDPR, having been conceived in a technology neutral way, is based on principles, and is therefore designed to cover new technologies as they develop.” It also indicated that it will “monitor the application of the GDPR to new technologies, also taking into account of possible future initiatives in the field of artificial intelligence and under the Data Strategy”.</p>
<p>10.5.6. There is a need for a framework for socially responsible restructuring and anticipating corporate change that complements the existing information, consultation and participation rights of workers and matches key elements of the European Social Model. The EESC believes that the European Commission should revise</p>	<p>In 2018, the Commission published a stocktaking report on the implementation of the EU Quality Framework for Anticipation of Change and Restructuring (QFR). This report assesses the implementation of the Framework and proposes a range of actions to increase the QFR’s</p>

<sup>32</sup> COM/2020/264 final

<p>the EU Quality Framework for Anticipation of Change and Restructuring and propose a legal basis for specific framework conditions concerning worker participation in order to improve workers' involvement in managing the challenges of the Green Deal and of the digital transformation.</p>	<p>effectiveness. It did not identify a need for further legislation.</p>
<p>10.5.7. The Action Plan should set a minimum floor of rights at EU level: the EESC has called for action on minimum income protection to stem poverty and promote an inclusive labour market, and therefore welcomes the plans of the Commission and the German Presidency of the Council to establish a European framework on minimum income schemes. The EESC has recommended exploring the possibility of setting common minimum standards in the field of unemployment insurance in the EU Member States. The Committee has also called for a European initiative on minimum wage and collective bargaining, and therefore welcomes the Commission's initiative on adequate minimum wages in the European Union .</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the fact that the Committee welcomes the Commission's initiative on adequate minimum wages in the European Union.</p> <p>The Council Conclusions “Strengthening minimum income protection in the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond” adopted under the German presidency recalls the existing EU framework of minimum income protection. The existing EU framework consists of the 1992 Council Recommendation on common criteria on sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems, the 2008 Commission recommendation on active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market and relevant monitoring and policy coordination activities within the European Semester that are underpinned by the EU benchmarking framework on minimum income protection. This is further supported by the mutual learning activities under the Open Method of Coordination process of the Social Protection Committee.</p> <p>The conclusions invite the Commission to “initiate an update of the Union framework to effectively support and complement the policies of Members States on national minimum income protection.”</p>

	<p>The Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights (principle 14 on minimum income), announces that the Commission will propose a Council Recommendation on minimum income in 2022, to effectively support and complement the policies of Member States</p> <p>The Council Conclusions also recommended to continue thematic work on monitoring the national systems with the Social Protection Committee through regular periodical reporting and facilitate exchange of views and best practices in its recently established technical forum of national authorities dealing with minimum income provision.</p>
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<p><b>N°9 Secure 5G deployment – EU toolbox</b>  <b>COM(2020) 50 final</b>  <b>EESC 2020/956 – TEN/704</b>  <b>554th Plenary Session – September 2020</b>  <b>Rapporteur: Alberto MAZZOLA (IT-I)</b>  <b>Co-rapporteur: Dumitru FORNEA (RO-II)</b>  <b>DG CNECT – Commissioner BRETON</b></p>	
<p><b>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</b></p>	<p><b>European Commission position</b></p>
<p>1.3. The EESC believes that it is important for the European 5G ecosystem to ensure integrity, confidentiality, management and operational responsibilities, safety, fungibility of supply, interoperability of hardware and software components, common technical standards, continuity of service, flow reliability and data protection, coverage in all areas, including sparsely populated areas, clear communication targeting users as active digital market players, and proactive adherence to the ICNIRP guidelines seeking to protect the health of the population, while reducing radiation as much as possible. Accordingly, ICNIRP has updated the radio-frequency EMF part of the 1998 Guidelines. This document presents these revised guidelines, which provide protection for humans from exposure to EMFs from 100 kHz to 300 GHz. Health Phys. 118(5):483–524; 2020-MARCH 2020. ICNIRP (2020) has made a number of changes to ensure that new technologies such as 5G will not be able to cause harm, regardless of our current expectations.</p>	<p>The Commission is working on the implementation of a 5G and future 6G partnership with industry under the Horizon Europe programme. The approach covers the full supply chain, in addition to the connectivity that is already a domain of EU world-class expertise and will ensure a strong and secure European 5G ecosystem.</p> <p>The protection of public health is of paramount importance for the Commission and is a priority in all its proposals and initiatives, including on 5G technology.</p> <p>Council Recommendation 1999/519/EC<sup>33</sup> recommends at the European level strict limits for exposure of the public to electromagnetic fields following a precautionary approach in line with the guidelines<sup>34</sup> of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP).</p> <p>For the general public, the exposure limits are 50 times lower than the levels identified as having health effects, based on scientific evidence and in accordance with the World Health Organisation</p>

<sup>33</sup> 1999/519/EC Council Recommendation of 12 July 1999 on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields (0 Hz to 300 GHz).

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.icnirp.org/cms/upload/publications/ICNIRPrfgdl2020.pdf>

	<p>(WHO) estimates. ICNIRP has last reviewed its guidelines in March 2020 in order to take into account the latest 5G technology evolution and the Commission is currently in the process of assessing, whether an update of the above Council Recommendation is necessary. It may seek the advice from the Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks<sup>35</sup> for this purpose.</p>
<p>1.4. The EESC asks the Commission to strictly monitor progress in the deployment and real use of 5G and calls on the Member States to further accelerate the process and ensure a responsible implementation, catering for all safety and security aspects, including those relating to the impact of 5G technology on public health and living ecosystems, the social and economic impact, the impact on competition, education and training, and securing respect for fundamental rights.</p>	<p>The Commission has set up and supports the European 5G Observatory<sup>36</sup> that is monitoring progress in the deployment and real use of 5G across the EU and worldwide.</p> <p>The Commission Recommendation of 26 March 2019<sup>37</sup> addresses the cyber risks related to 5G networks. The coordination and cooperation process on 5G cybersecurity at EU-level is different from the one on potential effects of 5G technology on public health.</p>
<p>1.5. The EESC calls for the EU to be a global leader in the next generation of 5G mobile technology, equipped with secure digital infrastructure as a solid building block of a new, modern European industrial strategy through a radical shift in mobile connectivity and with huge dynamic potential to increase productivity and boost the economy and services for the people.</p>	<p>The EU has been a global leader in 5G research since 2011, when the Commission launched pioneering research and innovation actions in 5G, followed by the setting up in 2013 of the 5G Public-Private Partnership, the largest 5G research and innovation initiative in the world.</p> <p>The 5G Action Plan was adopted in 2016 to support the deployment and take-up of 5G networks across the EU and to promote the wider digitisation of key industries with innovative business models. The Commission initiated in 2018 pioneering 6G research and innovation</p>

<sup>35</sup> SCHEER is the successor of the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly identified Health Risks (SCENIHR) - [https://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific\\_committees/scheer\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/scheer_en). The above scientific body is appointed and renewed as appropriate following an open and objective selection process.

<sup>36</sup> <https://5gobservatory.eu/>

<sup>37</sup> C(2019) 2335 final.

	<p>under the Horizon 2020 programme. On this basis, the Commission has also been working on the implementation of a 6G partnership with industry under the future Horizon Europe programme.</p> <p>The approach covers the full supply chain, in view of reconstructing EU capabilities in domains such as devices and distributed computing, in addition to the connectivity domain that is a classical domain of EU world-class expertise. It envisages participation of vertical industries also to leverage Europe’s strong industrial capabilities in support of the creation of complete EU digital ecosystems.</p> <p>In its Communication on ‘2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade’<sup>38</sup>, the Commission identified secure and performant sustainable digital infrastructures as one of the four ‘cardinal points’ for mapping the EU’s trajectory, as part of a ‘Digital Compass’ to translate the EU’s digital ambitions for 2030 into concrete targets and to ensure that these objectives are met. The Communication includes the objective of having all European households covered by a Gigabit network, with all populated areas covered by 5G by 2030.</p>
<p>1.6. In particular, the EESC believes it is vital to assess the risk profile of suppliers and apply relevant restrictions for suppliers considered to be high risk – including necessary exclusions to effectively mitigate risks and define liabilities – for key assets defined as critical and sensitive in the EU coordinated risk assessment.</p>	<p>The Report on the impacts of the Commission Recommendation of 26 March 2019 on the Cybersecurity of 5G networks<sup>39</sup> published in December 2020 notes that measures aimed at applying restrictions based on the risk profile of suppliers have been adopted, proposed or planned in nearly all Member States, taking into account the approach</p>

<sup>38</sup> COM(2021) 118 final

<sup>39</sup> SWD(2020) 357 final.

	<p>recommended in the Toolbox. Only a small minority of Member States have yet to define clear plans to implement these measures.</p>
<p>1.7. The EESC believes that it is indispensable for Europe to take a medium-term approach to autonomy and self-sufficiency in this field and advocates strongly for research and a range of European companies. The EESC considers it important to increase EU resources for digital R&amp;I and support operator and supplier investment in new technical security functionalities, which should be able to go hand in hand with the ability of the market to recognise and remunerate all initiatives aimed at increasing the security and resilience of systems.</p>	<p>Within the next Multiannual Financial Framework, strengthening digital Research and Innovation and cybersecurity in Europe will primarily be supported under the Horizon Europe programme (cluster on Civil Security for Society) and the Digital Europe programme.</p> <p>Moreover, the European Council conclusions of 2 October 2020<sup>40</sup> endorsed President von der Leyen’s proposal that 20% of the Recovery and Resilience Facility be invested in digital.</p> <p>Accelerating 5G deployment was identified as an eligible area. The Recovery and Resilience Facility is an opportunity to create European flagships with tangible benefits for the economy and citizens across the EU. The connectivity flagship aims at a fast rollout of secure connectivity and the expansion of rapid broadband services including fibre and 5G networks to make the EU future-proof in line with the 2025 objectives.</p> <p>In its Conclusions, the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council of 3 December 2019<sup>41</sup> welcomed ‘the ongoing preparation by the Commission, in cooperation with Member States and the private sector, of a strategic European partnership on Smart Networks and Services under Horizon Europe’.</p> <p>It also called upon Member States, the</p>

<sup>40</sup> EUCO 13/20.

<sup>41</sup> 14517/19 Council Conclusions on the significance of 5G to the European Economy and the need to mitigate security risks linked to 5G.

	<p>Commission and the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, to ‘take all necessary measures within their competences to ensure the security and integrity of electronic communication networks, in particular 5G networks’.</p> <p>Thus, Member States are fully supportive of such a 6G focused partnership, which should try to comply with the objectives of the Communication of 29 January 2020 on Secure 5G deployment in the EU - Implementing the EU toolbox<sup>42</sup>.</p>
<p>1.8. It is important to ensure security for all Member States, including by maintaining research centres in a variety of areas of the EU: in addition, the EESC reiterates its suggestion of having at least two suppliers for each country, at least one of which is European, in order to ensure political security of data and respect for health requirements.</p>	<p>The EU 5G Toolbox<sup>43</sup> recommends ensuring a diversity of suppliers for individual mobile network operators, through appropriate multi-vendor strategies (Strategic Measure 05 of the Toolbox).</p> <p>The Report on the impacts of the Commission Recommendation published in December 2020 noted that several Member States introduced measures in that sense, such as requesting that Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) submit their sourcing and diversification strategies to national authorities. Other Member States have not yet taken specific measures due to several challenges already identified in the July Progress<sup>44</sup> report (e.g. size of the country, difficulties to define appropriate multi-vendor strategies, interoperability issues).</p> <p>In addition, the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications prepared a report on the topic of supplier diversification, in which it identified the need to establish a greater understanding of several issues, in</p>

<sup>42</sup> COM(2020) 50 final.

<sup>43</sup> [Cybersecurity of 5G networks - EU Toolbox of risk mitigating measures](#)

<sup>44</sup> [Report on Member States’ progress in implementing the EU Toolbox on 5G Cybersecurity](#)

	<p>particular as regards: (1) specific risk scenarios related to the 5G supply chain, (2) potential gains and limitations of network architectures such as Open Radio Access Networks (Open RAN), and (3) a more holistic understanding of the costs and impacts related to implementing various approaches of multi-vendor strategies by MNOs.</p>
<p>1.6. The EESC recommends that European technological diplomacy be strengthened to enable the EU to ensure more balanced, reciprocal conditions for trade and investment, in particular as regards market access, subsidies, public procurement, technology transfers, industrial property and social and environmental standards.</p>	<p>In order to support the Toolbox objectives, the Commission is putting in place a number of supporting actions to avoid distortions in the 5G supply market.</p> <p>For example, the Commission will screen foreign direct investments in the 5G area for risks to security and public order or programmes of EU interest, in line with Regulation EU2019/452<sup>45</sup>, which entered into force in October 2020.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission can implement trade defence measures to address potential trade distorting practices (dumping or subsidisation), including by launching preliminary enquiries where appropriate, in order to protect EU actors in the European 5G market. To this end, the Commission is monitoring very actively 5G markets in the EU and in third countries.</p>

<sup>45</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of 19 March, 2019 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union, OJ L 79I , 21.3.2019, p. 1–14