It is precisely for this reason that in 2017 Group III decided to commission a study to CNVOS (Centre for information service, cooperation and development of NGOs, Slovenia) and ENNA (European Network of National Civil Society Associations) in order to better understand what is going on within European civil society organisations (CSOs), what challenges they face, how those challenges are affecting them and how they react to them. The study The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030 was presented on the occasion of an extraordinary meeting of our Group on 15 February, an event which was both the dénouement and a new point of departure of our work on the role of European civil society.

Having begun in March 2011 with a high level conference on the prospects for participatory democracy in Europe, which led to the adoption of a Roadmap, we have sought to build on EESC activities on the topic since 1999. During all these years we revisited the subject with the conference Reshaping Europe: civil society’s perspective of the Europe of Tomorrow - inspired by an eponymous study that we commissioned to Bertelsmann Stiftung (2015).

But we also shared our passions with our colleagues in the other Groups ensuring that the Committee as a whole has adopted numerous key Opinions over the last few years, including on Article 11 of the TEU, on evaluating EC stakeholder consultations, on financing civil society organisations in the EU. In addition, recently the Committee decided to create a new body to examine the broad topic of fundamental rights, the rule of law and state of democracy.

The EESC commissioned study identifies five societal trends as those which have most affected civil society organisations (CSOs) in recent years and which will continue to do so until 2030. They include demographic changes, the economic crisis, digitalisation, populism and the shrinking civic space. These elements are common throughout Europe, but their impact differs according to the country, the region and even the policy area and yet together, they make for a toxic combination which is already having devastating consequences on European civil society.

However, the study as well as the panellists and participants in our event point out clear and encouraging signs: the willingness to engage both from CSOs and institutions, to stand-up for the European values outlined in Art.2 of the TEU and to act upon them, to preserve and develop the European democratic system in which CSOs glue
The EESC Various Interest’s Group officially presented the study ‘The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030’ at its Extraordinary meeting organised on 15 February 2018 in the presence of Ramón Luis Valcarcel Siso, Vice-President of the European Parliament in charge of relations with the EESC and the European Committee of the Regions. Ideas and recommendations discussed during the event will contribute to a new momentum for our work on the role of European civil society.

The launch event was moderated by Daniela Vincenti, Editor in chief at EURACTIV and led to a lively exchange of views among experts, representatives of European CSOs and EU institutions, and EESC members.

The event was opened by Luca Jahier, President of the EESC Various Interests Group, and Gerry Salole, member of the EESC Liaison Group and Chief Executive of the European Foundation Centre.

In his introductory remarks, Group III President Luca Jahier highlighted two major issues.

Firstly, he put emphasis on the societal trends identified in the study as those which have most affected civil society organisations (CSOs) in recent years and which will continue to do so until 2030:

1. demographic changes
2. economic crisis
3. digitalisation
4. populism
5. a shrinking civic space

The second issue he elaborated on his speech on digitalisation and individualism which have a significant negative impact on CSOs because people are using social media for their activism, as opposed to participation in CSOs. The number of volunteers working in CSOs decreases and citizen movements risk having less impact without the sustained and structured commitment that CSOs provide.

In his introductory remarks, Gerry Salole also stressed the risks of closing civil society in a “box” of definition because of its rich heterogeneity.

Europe III
together our societies, playing an intermediary role between citizens and institutions. Without competing with the executive, legislative, the judiciary nor the media – but playing a complementary role and ensuring the resilience of our democratic system. CSOs promote and defend our fundamental European values, they forge and consolidate identity, trust and solidarity.

These three elements are negatively impacted by the individualism and digitalization, as stressed in the study. Namely: activism via social media versus volunteering in CSOs providing actual sustained and structured commitment, the multiplication of ‘fake news’ versus social trust and social contracts. A recent BBC poll of 18 countries, found that 79% of respondents were worried about what is real and what is fake on the Internet – thus alimenting the rise of populism.

Without any doubts we are facing very serious and systemic threats to our democratic systems. However, let’s not forget that in life, challenges are not only risks but also opportunities, opportunities to exercise our freedom to make choices and take responsibility for these choices. Today in 2018, one hundred years after the end of the First World War when liberalism was returned to Europe, we have to re-activate the feeling of European responsibility, engage as citizens with obligations and responsibility for democracy. Without wanting to ring the alarm bells too loudly, we should realise that the year 2030 is just around the corner, so we must take up action, now!

‘Civil society has a pivotal role to play in promoting and defending our fundamental values, in forging and in consolidating identity, trust and solidarity’

introductory remarks by Group III President Luca Jahier

‘Civil society is ever-changing and eternal. It is humanity’s response to crisis. You cannot have effective civil society if it does not reflect people in the streets. It has to play a role in bringing solutions to problems’

remarks by Gerry Salole
After the opening session, Goran Forbici, Director of the Centre for information service, cooperation and development of NGOs (Slovenia) presented his study. An initial response and ideas for further consideration were provided by Dr. Sabine Selchow, research fellow on the ARC-Laureate Programme in International History, University of Sydney and Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, London School of Economics (LSE).

Some suggestions formulated by Dr. Sabine Selchow to move further the reflections contained in the study: thinking beyond information technology taking into account broader cultural changes, considering the role of security as well as planetary boundaries.

An animated and dynamic debate followed, with the inspiring contributions of Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso, Vice-President of the European Parliament in charge of relations with the EESC and the European Committee of the Regions and Paweł Świeboda, Deputy Head of the European Commission’s European Political Strategy Centre.

Vice-President Valcárcel Siso underlined the importance of listening, communicating and involving citizens, especially young people acknowledging that this has not been done sufficiently in the past:

“We have to ensure that young people participate and want to participate’ An answer is needed! Populism is not a cause. It is an effect of what we did wrong. We cannot cross the red lines. What weapons have we got? We have to protect our basic pillars’ ‘Let’s talk about the future by looking at the challenges of the present’” – were amongst the statements of Mr Valcárcel Siso.

Mr Paweł Świeboda drew particular attention to the relevance of citizens’ obligations and responsibilities, to engage in civic life and act upon the European values.

Director of CNVOS and author of the study Goran Forbici presenting key findings, methodology, insights, societal trends and remaining challenges to be tackled together: development of services, leadership succession, upgrading CSOs societal role, promoting digital skills and data security, restoring a belief trust in basic freedoms and human rights, improving CSOs transparency and EU funding.

Some suggestions formulated by Dr. Sabine Selchow to move further the reflections contained in the study: thinking beyond information technology taking into account broader cultural changes, considering the role of security as well as planetary boundaries.

In his closing remarks Luca Jahier also called upon more cooperation between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EESC to enhance the dialogue with CSOs and make sure that participatory democracy fully complements representative democracy.

CONTENT OF THE STUDY

The publication promoted by the Group III in cooperation with the Liaison Group and commissioned in the framework of the annual study programme for 2017 was divided in 4 chapters. It was drawn up with the purpose of examining what might await European CSOs until 2030, what are the main challenges and how these should be tackled.

CHAPTER 1 looks at European civil society organisations, their scope, impact and regional differences.

CHAPTER 2 identifies the five societal trends in relation to their nature and evolution, geographical coverage, impact on CSOs and CSOs’ response already taken.

CHAPTER 3 takes a close look at some of the changes affecting the CSOs sector such as the shift in public funding, the changing role of CSOs, the changing nature of volunteering and the rise of social economy), which have evolved as a combination of different trends: increase of social inequalities, climate change, political changes, changes of political nature of the EU, Brexit…

THE LAST CHAPTER explores scenario for the European Union and CSOs by 2030 in regards to identified trends. It includes the future prospects of the five trends, challenges for CSOs and their relations with the national and EU institutions, as well as recommended strategies for tackling the challenges.

‘CSOs are seen as drivers of change, a space for initiatives and society’s development. They are also providers of alternative economic models and social innovations. Their work is affected most by the emergence of new and diverse needs that require new types of responses. It seems that civil society is considered a panacea for almost all EU problems.’

Danijel Baturina, researcher, Institute for Social Policy, Faculty of Law Zagreb.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FEBRUARY PLENARY SESSION
Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Reducing barriers to cross-border distribution of investment funds (rolling programme)” – ECO/452

Mihai IVAŞCU (RO) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Financial Technology (Fin Tech) (rolling programme)” – ECO/454

Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (ES) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Sustainable Finance (communication” – ECO/456

Mihai IVAŞCU (RO) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Support to structural reforms in the Member States” – ECO/450

Elżbieta SZADZIŃSKA (PL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Quality of water for human consumption (recast)” – NAT/733

Gabriel SARRÓ IPARRAGUIRRE (ES) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Multiannual plan for demersal fisheries in the Western Mediterranean (rolling programme)” – NAT/731

Pirkko RAUNEMAA (FI) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Transparency in scientific assessments and governance of EFSA” – NAT/732

Rudolf KOLBE (AT) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Artificial intelligence: anticipating its impact on jobs to ensure a fair transition” (own-initiative opinion) – INT/845

Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (ES) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Trust, privacy and consumer security in the Internet of Things (IoT)” (own-initiative opinion) – INT/846

Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Taxation in the Digitalised economy” (own-initiative opinion) – ECO/458

Pavel TRANTINA (CZ) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Costs of non-immigration (and non-integration)” (information report) – SOC/574

José Custódio LEIRIÃO (PT) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Employment opportunities for economically inactive people” – SOC/575

Tom JONES (UK) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “The contribution of Europe’s Rural Area to the 2018 Year of Cultural Heritage ensuring sustainability and urban/rural cohesion” (own-initiative opinion) – NAT/738

Thierry LIBAERT (FR) is the Co-rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Indicators better suited to evaluate the SDGs – the civil society contribution” (own-initiative opinion) – NAT/737

Cillian LOHAN (IE) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Facilitating access to climate finance for non-state actors” (own-initiative opinion) – NAT/736

Lutz RIBBE (DE) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “The effects of a new carbon-free, decentralised and digitalised energy supply structure on jobs and regional economies” (own-initiative opinion) – TEN/660

Bryan JOHN (IE) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “EU-Mercosur Association Agreement” (own-initiative opinion) – REX/503

Jane MORRICE (UK) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “The White Dove Way – Proposal for an EU-led Global Peace-building strategy” (own-initiative opinion) – REX/503

Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Women in the Western Balkans” (own-initiative opinion) – REX/502

Mihai IVAŞCU (RO) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Future challenges and industrial change facing the EU Aerospace Sector” (own-initiative opinion) – CCMI/158

Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (LT) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Europe’s woodworking competitiveness strategy” (information report) – CCMI/159

Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (LT) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Sustainable inclusive bio-economy – new opportunities for European economy” (own-initiative opinion) – CCMI/160

The full listing of membership of the study groups for the new work may be consulted here: https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/news/new-works-february-2018
The EESC’s work on the Economic and Monetary Union package

On 6 December 2017, the European Commission released a package of proposals on completion of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which was promised by the Commission’s President Jean-Claude Juncker in his 2017 State of the Union speech having been agreed as part of the Five Presidents’ Report in 2015. The EESC has been asked to deliver an opinion on the EMU package, to be adopted during the April plenary session, with Mihai Ivaşcu from Group III as rapporteur and Stefano Palmieri from Group II as co-rapporteur.

The EC’s package of proposals is an ambitious roadmap towards completion of the EMU. It includes a proposal on transforming the European Stability Mechanism into the European Monetary Fund, a proposal on integrating the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG) into the EU’s legal framework and a proposal on creating a crucial new role in the EU’s architecture by appointing a European Economic and Finance Minister to take office at the start of the Commission’s new term.

The EESC applauds the Commission’s efforts but cannot support it fully and enthusiastically, since a number of social, political and economic aspects highlighted in our previous opinions have been omitted. The EESC is working to deliver its opinion and to propose a number of concrete recommendations, in order to provide the other European Institutions with an important perspective on how the EMU roadmap can be improved and accelerated, establishing a clearer and more transparent view of the implementation process.

Deepening the EMU shall improve several aspects of the EU as a whole: more jobs and growth, greater macroeconomic stability, and additional investment and social justice. At a time when economic development across the EU is at its highest since the economic and financial crises, a strong and stable euro area is essential for its Member States. The economic and financial crisis highlighted some important institutional weaknesses that need to be tackled as soon as possible, at a time when “the sun is shining”, economically speaking.

On 29 January 2018, the ECO section of the EESC held an important conference on the EMU package, to which it invited renowned specialists from other EU institutions: Massimo Suardi (deputy head of the Cabinet of Commission Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis), Wouter Coussens (economic adviser to the European Council President Donald Tusk) and Luděk Niedermayer (MEP and vice-chair of the ECON Committee). On the second panel, other experts including Bernard Snoy (president of the European League for Economic Cooperation) and Olivier Garnier (director general for Economics and International Relations at Banque de France) shared their views with the two EESC Rapporteurs and the members of the ECO section.

The speakers and participants at this event agreed that the current challenges for the EU Member States and the lessons learned from tackling the sovereign debt crisis showed a clear need to reform and deepen the EMU. Participants in the general discussion urged the Member States and the Commission to ensure the sustainability of future finances by quickly completing the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union. They also asked for the fiscal rules to be revised and simplified before integrating the substance of the TSCG into the EU’s legal framework. In addition, more attention needed to be paid to the impact of Brexit, the future of the EU budget and the political and social dimensions of the EMU.

Finally, the rapporteurs for the EESC opinion on the EMU package agreed that the current challenges for the EU Member States and the lessons learned from tackling the sovereign debt crisis showed a clear need to reform and deepen the EMU. Participants in the general discussion urged the Member States and the Commission to ensure the sustainability of future finances by quickly completing the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union. They also asked for the fiscal rules to be revised and simplified before integrating the substance of the TSCG into the EU’s legal framework. In addition, more attention needed to be paid to the impact of Brexit, the future of the EU budget and the political and social dimensions of the EMU.

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To conclude, here are some aspects of the ongoing work taking place as part of the EESC opinion on the EMU package:

- The EESC stresses the need to develop new financial instruments to prevent crises and counter pro-cyclical measures.
- The fact that European citizens need a better Europe in the future, and one that contributes more to their lives, should be taken into account when evaluating and implementing the EMU package.
- The completion of the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union should remain the top priority on the agenda.
- Steps must be taken to immediately and effectively address the problem of non-performing loans (NPL).
- It is of paramount importance for the European Monetary Fund to have a more active role in the EU context, one that is similar to the International Monetary Fund’s role internationally: supporting economic development and absorbing shocks, not just preventing banking crises.
- The TSCG should be incorporated into EU law, together with the transformation of the ESM into the EMF, without cherry-picking opportunities for the Member States.
- Finally, the EESC wonders whether we will see more proposals to appoint new EU ministers in the near future.

See you at the April 2018 EESC plenary session, when we shall deliver on the EMU Package!
Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

Meeting of the EESC Enlarged Presidency with EU Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier – 6 February

In the framework of the EESC Enlarged Presidency with EU Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier taking place on 6 February, Mister Barnier stressed the fact that ‘the time has come for the UK to make a choice’ concerning the future relation which will be translated into a Political Declaration accompanying the Withdrawal Agreement, which could take the form of a free-trade agreement, similar to the one signed by the EU with Canada and Japan.

Policy Learning Forum – On Upskilling pathways: a vision for the future 7-8 February

Various research shows that approximately 5 million jobs will be lost before 2020 as artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology and other socio-economic factors replace the need for human workers. Up to 50 percent of low-skilled jobs will be automated in 10 years’ time and the rest will require higher skills. Meanwhile, 70 million adults in EU are low skilled and at great risk of poverty and social exclusion. If their literacy, numeracy and digital skills are not improved, those who find themselves out of work are unlikely to have the necessary skills to compete for the new roles.

So how can we prepare for this? What measures need to be implemented to improve the situation? How can we help those who are poorly skilled, unemployed, in precarious work, from disadvantaged backgrounds, early school leavers, inactive, etc. to be better prepared for the future?

The European Economic and Social Committee and CEDEFOP organised a joint policy learning forum on Upskilling pathways: a vision for the future in Brussels on 7-8 February.

The forum brought together countries, social partners and other civil society organisations to help one another design and implement measures for improving the literacy, numeracy and digital skills of adults with poor knowledge, skills and competences, in line with the Council recommendation on Upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults. This was the first in a series of similar events to be organised by CEDEFOP to complement the Commission’s ongoing initiatives in this area.

The forum was attended by more than 100 participants from all 28 EU Member States, who discussed how the strategies for upsckilling pathways are implemented in each country and adapted to specific contexts, whether the different stakeholders share the same vision and the same priorities, what the main challenges facing different stakeholders and countries are, and how these challenges can be addressed and overcome.

The Member States face common challenges in the design and implementation of the upsckilling pathways. Forum participants underlined the importance of creating public-private partnerships and getting all the relevant stakeholders involved in implementing the pathways. They agreed on the significance of coherent policies that cut across different ministries, involving employers, trade unions and civil society working together to address the needs of low-skilled individuals – a heterogeneous target group with diverse needs.

The main purpose of this hearing was to debate the effectiveness and efficiency of EU policies for SMEs and gather valuable input and feedback from Swedish stakeholders on the matter with a view to finding ways in which they can be improved. It was part of the EESC follow-up work related to its opinion on Improving the effectiveness of EU policies for SMEs, adopted in July 2017.

Issues such as access to finance, improving access to markets and internationalisation, promoting entrepreneurship, reducing the administrative burden, simplification, supporting SMEs’ competitiveness and innovation were at the forefront. The stakeholders were also invited to express their views on the current definition of SMEs and on its potential need for revision.

Vice-President of the GRIII Ariane Rodert took part in the debate How effective is EU legislation for SMEs?

Ariane RODERT (SE)
National Forum for Voluntary Social Work (FFSA)
Vice-President of the Various Interests’ Group

Public Hearing: How effective is EU legislation for SMEs in Sweden? 20-21 February
Careful analysis of learning needs is required to create appropriate policies, and there are different tools already available; what is important is to use them, and so it is necessary to communicate better regarding existing tools, commit to improving the situation for low-skilled adults and ensure continuity through long-term planning and financial resources.

Mr Pavel Trantina (Group III) advocated for the creation of a quality charter for the validation of non-formal and informal learning to build confidence in the upskilling pathways measures. He emphasised the importance of guidance in a lifelong learning context as well as giving incentives to companies and individuals to provide and undertake upskilling.

Why investing in skills matters?

The potential gain of upskilling is enormous. Investing in skills far outweighs the costs – every policymaker needs to understand this. Hand in hand with all social partners and stakeholders, we must work to put in place an adult skills system in the EU that can build an economy that works for each and every citizen. It is challenging, but urgent and absolutely crucial.

More information:

CEDEFOP Research Paper on Investing in skills pays off: the economic and social cost of low-skilled adults in the EU:

Thierry LIBAERT (FR)
Fondation Nicolas Hulot pour la Nature et l’Homme
Member of the Various Interests’ Group

This month, Thierry Libaert has seen the 3 following books being published:

“Pro en communication” is an operational book on the actions of communication. It mainly provides instructions for use related to different communication activities.

More information:
http://www.vuibert.fr/ouvrage/9782311622232-pro-en-communication

“Développement durable, une communication qui se démarque” is an academic book with articles on different aspects of communication related to sustainable development.

More information:

“Au coeur des turbulences climatiques” is a book of interviews Thierry Libaert had with Professor Van Ypersele, colleague and Environmental Sciences Professor at the Université catholique de Louvain (UCL) and ex Vice-President of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This book is an updated translation in Dutch of a previous book published 2 years ago in a French version.

More information:
On 20 and 21 February, the 9th plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) took place in Giza, in Egypt, at the invitation of Mr. Mohamed Kamal El Daly, Governor of Giza. This plenary was an opportunity to debate the role of the local and regional authorities in managing migration as well as the two thematic reports drawn up by the Commission for Sustainable Territorial Development, on women empowerment on combating radicalisation and on violent extremism among young people in the Mediterranean.

Christian Moos, EESC Rapporteur on Cooperation with civil society to prevent the radicalisation of young people intervened during this plenary session and is sharing an excerpt of his speech.

“(...) The EESC doesn’t only react to legislative proposals. It can also present own-initiative opinions in order to highlight priorities from a civil society perspective. In December last year, it adopted such an own-initiative opinion on “Cooperating with civil society to prevent the radicalisation of young people”.

However, it must be said, that our findings, the proposals we make, are based on societal realities, challenges and opportunities we are facing in the EU member states.

It may be in the context of Egypt with its proud history and people, developments of the recent and more distant past, its economic and its political situation create a different background.

Yet, it is my firm belief that some of the suggestions we as civil society representatives have made in order to prevent radicalisation can be of use also for our partners’ efforts to save young people from falling into the trap of preachers of hatred and terror; as much as, of course, we can learn from the experience of our Mediterranean partners.

However, we have to be careful how we define radicalisation. And we should seek consensus on who we understand as radical, extremist or terrorist.

I would like to underline: Radicalisation of young people is neither merely a phenomenon involving radical violent islamist groups, nor does it only concern young men. The process of radicalisation of young people seems to be quite universal, which means that there must be universal counter agents also in its prevention.

The slipping away from society, friends and family and adopting a new exclusive identity that draws a sharp line between the in- and the outgroup is common place also in other religions’ radical movements, sectarian groups, left- and right-wing political extremists.

I would like, if I may, to present some key findings of which I believe that might be worth discussing also in our given context:

1. Values - Resilience against radicalisation must be value-based. And we believe that these values must be those of a diverse society, which puts human dignity and human rights in a preeminent place. In the European context, this also means resilience against anti-democratic, xenophobic and populist tendencies.

2. Cooperation - The public authorities should have a strong interest in cooperating with organized civil society, all the while respecting civil society’s organizations’ identity and independence. Cooperating with youth organizations is very important for obvious reasons.

3. Diversity - We cannot prevent radicalisation just through police measures nor only by investing more in the educational system. A multi-agency approach is most suited to achieve optimal results. This multi-agency approach brings together policy makers, public authorities, institutions, social partners and other NGOs, science and the media.

4. Money - An effective fight against radicalisation that focuses not only on law-enforcement but also on prevention needs sustainable financing and long-term budgetary resources. Official programmes must also be made available. Already existing cooperation efforts that unite the partners in the Mediterranean region should be strengthened. Obviously, this is in everybody’s interest.

5. Networking - At the EU level, there is the Radicalisation Awareness Network that brings together practitioners such as for instance prison officers and provides all parties involved with resources and information. This network must be further enhanced but it can serve as a good example for international cooperation.

6. Training - Prevention work requires training. Civil society volunteers need knowledge and skills but also public servants, front-line staff in touch with the population. Teachers for instance, can be trained to identify signs of radicalisation. At the same time, we have to tread carefully so as not to encourage denunciation or discrimination. A lot of sensitivity is needed here and there is certainly a thin red line.

7. Advice - Support services for teaching staff, but also and even more so, for friends and relatives of youngsters showing signs of radicalisation must be made available. This not with the aim to arrest a suspect but to help the potential victim of radicalisation by stopping a downward spiral, which pulls them into a world of black and white thinking and violence as a legitimate way of expression and the readiness even to sacrifice their own lives for their new group’s sanctified purpose.

8. Education - Inclusive formal and non-formal education are key to the prevention of radicalisation. Teaching critical thinking and media literacy and the above-mentioned value-based resilience is of utmost importance.

9. Inclusion - It is likely that radicalisation has a strong social dimension. It does not affect only the poor, not at all. Well trained young people of economically privileged background do also become
terrorists. But it seems that they have a strong sense of injustice albeit as embittered observers that gives them cause to open up to radical agents. In other words, poverty and unemployment do not necessarily lead to radicalisation but fighting poverty and youth unemployment is still a cornerstone in the prevention of radicalisation.

10. **Non-discrimination** - A fair society with equal opportunities and effective strong non-discrimination policies can be of pre-emptive value. This is a field of action where we have made many mistakes in most European countries. There are many short-comings. There is still a lot to be done.

11. **Shared responsibility** - The responsibility is not only with our governments and public authorities. Religious communities play a vital role in the prevention of radicalisation. Thus, the EESC has urged these to engage in a value-based dialogue on peace and non-violence.

12. **The internet** - Radicalisation almost always happens through agents of terror, mostly real people who get in contact with their victims by abusing their trust and their wish to find answers to existential questions. Social media and the internet play a crucial role in this process and often enough these contacts can happen merely in the virtual space. Therefore, internet providers and companies have to assume their responsibility and stop hate speech and abusive platforms with extremist content without endangering the freedom of the web which again is a thin line.

These are only a few findings and observations which are supposed to help us, in the European Union, to identify best practices in the prevention of the radicalisation of young people. We are still at the beginning of this process really, with many more steps needing to be taken, and more experience will be necessary to eventually overcome this danger which is causing so much pain and sadness to all of us in all of our societies as varied, politically and economically, as they may be.”
The EESC mainly reiterates the positions expressed in its opinion on the proposals put forward by the Commission in 2015, which stated that the rules applicable to the sale of goods should be the same, regardless of the sales channel. This position has also been confirmed by both the European Parliament and the Council.

The EESC therefore welcomes the fact that this amended proposal extends the scope of the proposal for a directive on certain aspects concerning contracts for the online sales of goods to cover face-to-face sales as well.

Moreover, the EESC calls on the Commission to take account, in its proposal, of a number of recommendations made in its opinion.

The Commission’s proposal on the free flow of non-personal data in the European Union represents one of the most important legal aspects of the future European policy for developing the data economy and its repercussions on economic growth, scientific research, industry and services in general and public services in particular.

The Committee has already agreed that there is a need for a legislative initiative on the free flow of non-personal data, since this is a basic prerequisite for securing the objectives of the Digital Agenda and of achieving the Digital Single Market. The EESC considers, however, that the proposal is rather overdue, over and above the fact that the limited nature of its scope of application, the fluidity and lack of assertiveness of the mechanisms laid down and, most of all, the lack of ambition and political will and determination are likely to undermine its objectives. The Commission should and could have been more ambitious, and considers it as only a first step in the future development of more positive and consistent ways of securing genuinely free movement of non-personal data in the European Union’s digital market.

The EESC cannot endorse the current version of the document. The EESC is only willing to endorse this proposal if and in so far as the latter is amended in accordance with the suggestions outlined in this document and is clearly understood as a highest common standard acceptable to both Member States and stakeholders, but always viewed as a first step in the future development of more ambitious ways of securing genuinely free movement of non-personal data in the European Union’s digital market. The EESC’s endorsement is also on condition that these developments take due account of the international aspects of a global economy, of which this initiative should necessarily be a part.

The shift towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy has been driven to a great extent by bottom-up initiatives led by citizens, innovative businesses and various civil society stakeholders, collectively referred to as non-state and sub-national actors. In recent years, the number, scope and scale of non-state climate actions has grown rapidly.

The EESC calls for a “European Dialogue on Non-State Climate Action” (ED-NSCA) to strengthen and increase the scope and scale of Europe-based non-state climate action.

The proposed European Dialogue should provide an overview of climate actions within the EU and help track the progress of climate actions at a global level. It should collect feedback on an ongoing basis and address regulatory challenges with public authorities, in order to progressively build an enabling governance environment for bottom-up climate action. The ultimate goal of the proposed dialogue is to accelerate climate actions by making it attractive for a multiplicity of non-state actors to engage in climate actions, and to make climate action the new “business-as-usual”. The purpose of the dialogue should be to respond to the needs of non-state actors by inspiring new partnerships among state and non-state actors; facilitating peer learning, training and advice sharing among non-state actors as well as access to finance.

The EESC will play a leading role in initiating the dialogue and calls on the other EU Institutions, in particular the European Commission to join this effort to create an enabling environment for non-state climate action by co-operating in helping to operationalise the dialogue.

The first step for the European Dialogue for Non-State Climate Action should be an event in the first half of 2018, gathering all interested networks of actors as well as representatives of other EU Institutions and the Member States, organised in the spirit of the Talanoa dialogue and serving to establish a clear Action Plan for the Dialogue.
The EESC recommends to all Member States to establish a clear and equivalent counterpart to ENISA, as most of them have not done it yet. It feels that ENISA should prioritise actions to support e-government.

The EESC supports the proposal to create cyber security competence network sustained by a Cybersecurity Research and Competence Centre (CRCC).

The EESC recalls that the human factor constitutes one of the most important causes of cyber accidents.

The EESC supports the creation of an EU-certified curriculum for high schools and professionals.

The Committee believes that a European Digital Single Market needs a homogeneous interpretation of the rules for cybersecurity and that a certification framework and schemes for the different sectors could provide a common baseline.

With regards to funding, Europe should scale up investments converging different EU funds, national funds and private-sector investments towards strategic objectives in strong public-private cooperation, also through the creation of an EU Cybersecurity Fund for Innovation and R&D in the current and future Research Framework Programme. Furthermore, Europe should create a fund for deployment for the Cybersecurity.

Finally, the EESC believes a minimum security level is necessary for “ordinary” Internet of People (IoP) devices. In this case, certification is a key method of providing a higher level of security. Internet of Things (IoT) security should be a priority.

**TEN/646 – Opinion on Cybersecurity Act**

**ECO/401 – Lessons learned for avoiding the severity of austerity policies in the EU**

In February, the Group III Secretariat welcomed the new trainee Lea Vinson, who will be working there during 5 months.

Lea, 26 years old, is French. She did a bachelor’s degree in Law. After working in the UK for a year, she did the first year of her Masters in International Law at the University of Aix-Marseille, where she got involved with the Amnesty International youth group volunteers. She did the second year of her masters at the University of Grenoble.

During this final year, she completed an internship with the British NGO Release, where she focused on drug policy. She then gained more work experience doing an internship with the UNODC in Vienna.

Back in France, she worked for a few months with a local charity in Lyon, where she focused mainly on raising money to enable solidarity projects. She later joined the French NGO “l’Observatoire international des prisons” which aims to protect and promote the rights of prisoners.

She speaks fluent English and is working on improving her Spanish abilities. She likes to go to the movies, has a keen interest in all sorts of books and also enjoys writing, hiking and doing yoga.

**Welcome Lea!**
REFLEXION CORNER
More than a market place

The European Union is much more than a marketplace. Yet the narrative surrounding Brexit, certainly in the UK, focuses on the Customs Union, the Single Market and Britain’s future trading relations with the EU. To say the EU has more to offer its citizens than markets and money is an understatement.

EU citizens, whether in the UK or the other Member States, are not all traders, business people or bankers. They are also workers, consumers, pensioners, students, unemployed, yet these groups fall into the ‘almost forgotten’ category when it comes to surely the most important negotiations facing the EU since the Single Market was created.

The media may well come under fire for its top heavy focus on money and markets, but EU institutions must put their own houses in order when it comes to what they euphemistically describe as ‘citizen engagement’. Communication and information doesn’t always have to mean propaganda. There are ways and means to tell a ‘good’ story without getting into the realms of fake news.

ERASMUS must surely be one of the great EU initiatives, yet it hardly gets a mention in a press preoccupied with constitutional questions of sovereignty, identity, passports and border controls.

Peace is another ‘good’ European story yet few people are aware that the EU’s longest-lasting and most successful conflict resolution initiative, known as the PEACE Programme, has been operating in Northern Ireland since the nineties. By investing more than €2 billion in cross-community and cross-border projects, the PEACE Programme is widely credited as having contributed to the Northern Irish peace process which led to the Good Friday Agreement.

Once again, the Brexit negotiations focus on trade and tariffs when it comes to the Irish border. But the reality of the 300-mile border is the fact that people, who once lived back to back often in fear of each other, have finally turned to face and embrace each other thanks, in large part, to both Ireland and the UK being part of the European Union - not just the Single Market!

The Brexit talk today is about the complexities of customs, cohesion, levies and regulatory alignment, but if the powers that be started talking the real language of the marketplace, more people might just begin not only to understand but to have an affiliation with, and affection for, the European Union.

When they get together in the marketplace, shoppers and sellers talk about health and jobs and children and schools and prices and food and music and where to go on holiday. Common it may be but that’s the reality of life in the Market which too many people in the European debate have avoided for far too long.

OUR GROUP’S STRENGTH

The last meeting of the Consumers and Environment Category took place on 7 February 2018 and was co-chaired by Mr Cilian LOHAN and Mr Bernardo HERNández BATALLER. In the morning, the INT section secretariat presented the programme of the European Consumers Day 2018 to be held on 20 March in Sofia. Then, Mr LOHAN provided information on the study. The members also overviewed the several ongoing works and Mr LOHAN reported on the work on the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform. Mr PEGADO LIZ informed the members regarding the presentation A New Deal for Consumers. Proposed changes to consumer law directives. In the afternoon, Ms Francesca CATTARIN, BEUC Health policy officer, led the main debate on ‘Consumers’ health’.

On 15 February the Liberal Professions Category held its first meeting of the year. The meeting was chaired by Mr Arno METZLER, Vice-president of Group III and incoming President of the Group. Mr METZLER lead the whole process of the constitution of this new category and he handed it over to the two spokespersons designated by the category – both from Group III - who will be jointly in charge of coordinating and animating the works until September 2020:

- Mr Marina Elvira CALDERONE (IT) has been the president of the National Council of the Association of Employment Consultants since 2005 and the president of the Joint Committee of Professional Bodies, which represents the national councils of associations of Italian professions, since 2009. Ms CALDERONE has published books and numerous articles on employment and welfare.

- Mr Rudolf KOLBE (AT) represents the interests of chartered engineering consultants as vice-president of the Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineering Consultants and is member of the board of presidents of the Federal Committee of Liberal Professions, the umbrella organisation of the professions in Austria. On European level he is the president of the European Council of the Liberal professions (CEPLIS). He is an active liberal professional chartered engineer and owner of a company in the field of geodetic surveying in Austria.

The Category also decided to hold the European Day of Liberal Professions in the Autumn on the theme of self-regulation for a self-definition of Liberal Professions taking stock of the acquis of the Manifesto ‘Definitions of the concept of liberal profession at European level’ presented and debated at the Group III extraordinary meeting on 1 December in Rome on ‘The liberal professions, a lever for the development of Europe: towards a European manifesto of professionals’.

http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.categories