



European Economic
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PRESS RELEASE

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EESC President Luca Jahier visits Cyprus to strengthen cooperation with civil society organisations and explore ways to overcome political, social and cultural barriers

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Luca Jahier, will visit Cyprus on 13-14 February 2020, in the framework of the "Peace and Borders in Europe" series.

The visit will explore ways to overcome political, social and cultural barriers, as well as "borders of the mind". Such barriers restrict our freedom of thought and, ultimately, our actions, impeding us from finding new solutions, understanding the others' perspectives and thus hindering reconciliation and true peace.

Nicosia is the last stop of the series "**Peace and Borders in Europe**" initiated in Belfast in June 2019, and followed by Sopron for the 30th anniversary of the Pan-European Picnic in September 2019, and Berlin for the celebrations of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in November 2019.

"We must acknowledge the existence of very real divisions and conflicts in Europe. While the conflict in Cyprus has moved from the realm of violence into the realm of politics and law, the current situation is intolerable and a solution must be found. True peace is not only an absence of military conflict, is the precondition for prosperity and sustainable development," said **Luca Jahier** explaining his concerns over the island's tensions.

While many have tried to offer solutions, no proposal or path has been deemed acceptable by all actors. A sustainable solution to this conflict requires more efforts in reconciliation and exchange. A **cultural solution reconciles memories, provides a new common narrative**, and takes into account the hopes and fears of all citizens.

In Cyprus as in the prior visits, meetings with key political and civil society representatives will provide insights on collaboration, exchange and pathways towards solutions.

Indeed, **civil society is the solution**. The EESC stands strongly with the United Nations call for ensuring a meaningful role for civil society engagement in the peace process. As the UN Security Council Report of the Secretary General of 7 January 2020 pointed out, people-to-people initiatives of Cypriots from both communities are essential in peace education, environment, youth, entrepreneurship and gender.

"Civil society on both parts of the island can lead us down a pathway to drive change, which goes beyond political deadlocks and outside influences, towards a solution that respects human rights and the rule of law," said Luca Jahier.

Beyond meetings with civil society representatives from both communities, the President will meet with **Mr Nicos Nouris**, Minister of Interior and **Ms Zeta Emilianidou**, Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance.

The visit also envisages a focus on culture and education. "Culture can play a major role in economic and social development, can build bridges between communities and people and can create a new, positive narrative," said President Jahier.

Thanks to the collaboration of **Ms Androulla Vassiliou**, former EC Commissioner for Culture and Education from Cyprus, the delegation will meet the Bi-Communal Committee on Culture and the Bi-Communal Technical Committee on Education, where examples of civil society cooperation in the fields of culture and education between Greek and Turkish Cypriots will be presented.

A visit to the Reception and Accommodation Center for Applicants of International Protection in Kofinou will also take place.

"As the President of the EESC, the house of organised civil society, I offer for my institution to help in any way possible- for example by being a neutral meeting place for representatives of civil society from both the Greek Cypriot Community and the Turkish Cypriot community".

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