



European Economic
and Social Committee

February 2020



Diversity Europe Newsletter



BREXIT: moving into
the new era of EU-27

Foreword

Arno METZLER

President of the Diversity Europe Group



There are big challenges ahead

Dear Colleagues,

The new European Commission's program includes a big conference on the future of Europe. It is very likely that the EESC will be asked to make a substantial contribution. When we reflect upon the future of the EU, we should not be short-sighted. On the contrary, we must look far ahead and recognize that it is not more infrastructure in roads and railways, nor their respective funding that are necessary. No, we should invest more in research, education and soft skills. We should also look carefully at the issue of

personal rights in the EU, which should not be undermined by corruption and nepotism. In such an event, the result will be that citizens' and public opinion will turn against the EU. Indeed, in planning the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF), we must ensure that citizens are convinced that the European Institutions have dealt with taxpayers' money in an efficient and reasonable way and that they have not left it to criminal elements.

Dear reader, the UK left the EU on 31 January. As civil society representatives from the now EU-27, we call for a future EU-UK relationship to not only respect social and labour conditions, but also for civil society to be supportive in this future relationship. It is in our hands to organise European civil society in the three discussions mentioned above, with substantial creative contributions, which will attract the public and politicians at the same time.

Arno METZLER

President of the Diversity Europe Group

This issue:

Farewell to our UK Members and Delegates p. 3

The role of volunteering in the implementation of the sustainable development goals p. 6

Civil Society: the backbone of European values p. 6

Debating the priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU p. 7

Supporting the ECI 'End of the Cage Age' p. 8

From COP25 to a European Green Deal p. 8

Save the cow initiative and mountain farming in Bulgaria p. 9

The EESC welcomes EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement p.10

Welsh third sector seeking post-Brexit relations p. 10

Building on ACP-EU relations p. 11

News from the Consumers and Environment Category of the EESC p. 11

Group III Members working on new Opinions p. 12

FAREWELL TO OUR UK MEMBERS AND DELEGATES

31 January marked the **last day of membership of the UK** in the EU and in this edition of our newsletter, Members of the Diversity Europe Group share their **thoughts, hopes and expectations** on Brexit and the future relationship between the UK and the now 27 EU Member States.

Dr D'Sa was invited to speak at the EESC Plenary of January, in her capacity as the **longest-serving Member from the UK**. The record of her intervention is followed by written commentary by other Group III Members.



Dr. Rose D'SA

Member of the Diversity Europe Group

"I have been a Member of the European Economic and Social Committee for some 22 years; to give you some perspective, the Treaty of Maastricht was still in force, when I first arrived in October 1998.

For me, it has been a long journey to Brussels; I was born in Nairobi, Kenya in Africa to parents whose ancestors came from Goa, in India and I never imagined that I would one day be privileged to speak here, as a citizen of the UK, in Europe.

But now the EU has lost my adopted home country, the United Kingdom: a permanent member state of the UN Security Council and a wealthy, influential, enterprising and wonderful nation that fought to liberate Europe in two World Wars. It is a catastrophe.

We all expect so much from European leaders. Can the EU yet choose to examine its own conscience, or will it simply



move on with business as usual? Has it perhaps pressed too quickly for the ideal of 'ever closer political and economic Union' within our life-time? *Was it worth losing the UK for this ideal?*

If there is no such reflection, or shift of attitude, perhaps a satisfactory future deal with the UK may also be more difficult to conclude.

The Lisbon Treaty is so convoluted, that even the crucial matter of the future relationship of the exiting State is discussed *last*, rather than first, or

even at the same time as withdrawal, and may therefore yet end in failure. What is to happen after Britain leaves and the founding Treaties require significant revision? The Lisbon Treaty has been left un-amended for over 10 years. At some stage surely you will need the renewed agreement, or consent, of the peoples of Europe in the other 27 Member States and will *they* agree unanimously?

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak and ask God, to continue, to bless us all."

Jan DIRX

Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Whisky and Whiskey

Yes, dear friends on the other side of the Channel, **it nevertheless happened.** The absurd worlds of Monty Python and 'Yes, Minister', always made me laugh, but these worlds have been replaced by the even more absurd reality of Boris Johnson, and that only makes me cry. I am an optimistic person, so I assume that if the British find it lonely on an island alone, they will **cross the Channel to be able to argue again with great enthusiasm within the European Union.** In the meantime, with pain, I replace my stock of Scottish Whisky with Irish Whiskey. All the best.



Tom JONES

Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Membership for 14 years of the Diversity Europe Group introduced me to so many warm friends and colleagues, who taught me to **learn from listening and comparing such wide regional experiences.** I also learnt of the dynamic and importance of **voluntary citizenship.**



Jorge PEGADO LIZ

Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Over the years, friendships have been forged, opinions discussed and agreements reached. Throughout the course of this process, we have come to know each other better and have experienced, together, the **various challenges confronting Europe,** the Europe in which we all believe. Our differences have helped us to understand each other better and to deal, harmoniously and peacefully, together, with the challenges and difficulties we have encountered.

Brexit – a legitimate decision – took us all by surprise: right up until the very end of the arbitrary deadline, we never lost hope that it might be possible, in an **equally legitimate manner, to reverse it.** Today – the day when the decision comes into force – it seems irrevocable.

However, in our heart of hearts, irrational as it may seem, we still hope that our friends will return to this **common homeland of ours, Europe.** Even if we are no longer physically together, in spirit I will always be waiting for you to come back and join us for a new stage of our future journey, whatever form it may take. For my part, this is not 'farewell' but rather 'see you soon'.



Irene OLDFATHER

Member of the Diversity Europe Group

It is a sad farewell to colleagues.

I hope that it is 'farewell' and not 'goodbye' and in the **devolved countries of the UK** where our Parliaments all rejected the EU Withdrawal Bill, we look to you our European partners to keep faith with us and to keep the door open.

From the **perspective of Scotland,** we want to be not just observers but participants on the European stage. Our citizens have benefited enormously from EU membership - **there can be no Brexit from solidarity and cooperation.**

I hope through the EESC's Brexit Committee Chaired by Stefano Mallia, that we can find interim ways of being actively connected. I favour a **system of Special Envoys from each part of the UK,** connecting to the EESC Bureau and Plenary, until a more enlightened approach across the UK prevails. In the meantime thank you for your friendship, kindness and support.



Jane MORRICE

Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Renate HEINISCH

Member of the Diversity Europe Group and

Brendan BURNS

Member of Group I





Seamus BOLAND

Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group

Saying good-bye to dear friends is always sad. So saying goodbye to you, my friends and colleagues from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, is particularly sad. Your record in terms of quality contributions to the European Economic and Social Committee speaks for itself. However, **as Ireland's nearest neighbour, with lots of difficult history between our two countries, your loss will be particularly felt.** Your presence as representatives of Great Britain, working with us Irish, contributed hugely to the improved relationship between us as nations. I will miss you greatly. So for now, let's just say 'Au Revoir'.



Sir Graham WATSON

Member of the Diversity Europe Group

I have been proud to serve as a UK representative on the EESC and have enjoyed being a Member of its Diversity Europe Group. The work of the TEN and REX Sections, to which I have contributed, has been interesting and valuable. I regret the decision of the UK government to leave the European Union: it will impoverish not only the EU, but also - and more so - the UK. **I sincerely hope no other EU country will be so damaged by the prevailing winds of nationalism.**



Arno METZLER

President of the Diversity Europe Group

The plenary of the EESC on 22 and 23 January also included a commemorative session dedicated to the celebration of the UK's 47 years of EU membership. Following interventions by **Mr Tom Jenkins**, former President of the EESC and by **Ms Madeleine Kay**, pro-EU activist, the floor was taken by **Mr Arno Metzler**, President of the Diversity Europe Group. The latter fared 'goodbye', but not 'farewell' to the UK, thanking them for their valuable contribution to both the EESC and the EU. Mr Metzler commented that in the near future, a steady process of collaboration with UK civil society will undoubtedly emerge.

A high number of Group III Members intervened for the subsequent debate, including **Ms Morrice, Messrs Balon, McLoughlin, Maciulevičius, Jones, Comer, Ms Oldfather, Ms Raunemaa, Ms Savigny, Ms Kekelaki, Sir Graham Watson** and **Messrs Pegado Liz and Smyth**. Many interventions paid tribute to the UK, as a **model for civil society organisations in other European countries** and called on the EU-27 to remain vigilant for **populist tendencies**, such as those which spurred on Brexit. Other speakers stressed the fact that the EU-27 must **build good future working relations with the UK**, given the fact that the latter was the 2nd largest economy in the EU and the 5th largest economy in the world. Proposals were also made for each UK region to send an envoy to the EESC. The last speaker, **Sir Graham**



Watson, eloquently summed up the mood by commenting that "Nationality divides us, Europe unites us".

© Shutterstock

News from the Diversity Europe Group

The role of volunteering in the implementation of the sustainable development goals

On 12 and 13 March, the Diversity Europe Group will organise a thematic conference in Warsaw, Poland, entitled **'The Role of Volunteering in the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals – Nine Years on from the European Year of Volunteering'**.

The event will focus on the following topics:

- The current state and trends in the development of volunteering in the European Union;
- Public authorities' support to volunteers and volunteering organisations;
- International volunteering;
- New forms and trends in volunteering activities.

The conference in Warsaw aims to reaffirm the important social and economic role of volunteering in meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The event will highlight that volunteers can play an effective part in achieving these goals, by meeting social needs more rapidly and efficiently than public institutions, particularly

in view of the growing societal challenges that the authorities of the EU Member States are often unable to meet. Hence, the role of volunteering should be recognised and valued by all Commissioners of the new European Commission, and there should be long-term support for volunteers.



Civil Society: the backbone of European values

On 24 and 25 March, Group III will hold a meeting in Rijeka, Croatia, within the context of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Three topics will be debated during the event:

- Civic Space in the European Union;
- Solidarity in Practice;
- Sustainable Development and the Green Deal.



Highlights of the January plenary session

Debate on the priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU

During the January plenary of the EESC, the Members of the Committee were honoured by the presence of **Mr Gordan Grlić Radman, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia**. The six-months during the first semester of 2020 constitute the first time that Croatia has taken on the auspices of the **Presidency of the Council of the EU**.

Minister Grlić Radman outlined the four priorities of the Croatian Presidency, namely:

- **A Europe that develops**
- **A Europe that connects**
- **A Europe that protects**
- **An influential Europe**

The Croatian government representative highlighted that further **deepening of the Single Market, promoting transport, energy and digital connectivity, an effective migration policy and resilience to cyber threats** will dominate the next six months. Mr Grlić Radman added that the Croatian Presidency will seek to **promote the rule of law** and to enhance the EU's role and credibility, notably in the **Western Balkans and other neighbouring countries**.



Lidija PAVIĆ-ROGOŠIĆ, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

The Group III Croatian Member, **Ms Pavić-Rogošić** welcomed the commitment of the Croatian Presidency for **rural development, enlargement**

and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Ms Pavić-Rogošić stressed that **demographics** are of particular importance in the **Western Balkans** and asked how negotiations with the **Republic of Northern Macedonia** would be conducted in the next few months.



Kinga JOÓ, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Ms Joó noted that Croatia holds the Presidency at a **crucial time in the EU legislative cycle** and called on the Croatian Presidency to promote **European civil society, European values and competitiveness**.



Antonio LONGO, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Finally, **Mr Longo** commented that the **European Single Market** reflects both the past and the future of the EU. He stressed that the Single Market should be completed to benefit all citizens, with a **digital market** and **free movement** for all.

Supporting the ECI 'End the Cage Age'

Members welcomed **Ms Olga Kikou**, European Affairs Manager for **Compassion in World Farming**, who presented the **European Citizen's Initiative 'End the Cage Age'**. The animal welfare campaign has already raised **1.6 million signatures in 21 Member States** and has involved 170 organisations over a one-year period. The aim of this ECI is to encourage the phasing out and eventual banning of the use of cages in the EU. Currently **300 million animals spend all or part of their lives in cages**.



Irene OLDFATHER, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Ms Oldfather and **Messrs Schwartz and Thurner** intervened during the discussion, highlighting the following points:

- The links between **cramped living conditions** for animals and the emergence of **drug resistant super bugs**;
- The current **societal demand** to improve the living condition of animals and the **moral imperative** to reduce animal consumption;
- The advantages of **informing producers and consumers** on the facts surrounding the issue;
- The necessity for the **Farm to Folk labelling strategy** to be **extended to processed foods**.



Andreas THURNER, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Highlights of the January plenary session

From COP25 to a European Green Deal

Following the **COP25 meeting in Madrid** in December of last year and the new EC priority for a European Green Deal, a debate was held at the January EESC plenary entitled '**From COP25 to a European Green Deal**'.

Speakers included:

- **Virginijus Sinkevičius**, EC Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries
- **Ovais Sarmad**, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC
- **Enrico Giovannini**, spokesperson for the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS)
- **Semia Cherif**, Coordinating Lead Author for the MedECC, Tunisia

Of particular interest were the comments by the panellists that at the heart of the COP25 strategy is the **multilateralism** of the UN and on the EU. Similarly, that Climate Change constitutes an **existential challenge to the world** and that by 2030, renewable energy should represent **30% of all energy consumption within the EU**. The panellists also stressed that green products must become the norm, but at **reasonable prices**.



Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS, Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group

Among the Group III Members, **Mr Maciulevičius** highlighted the role of the **Blue Economy** and underlined that our economies can be **changed by working together** and that farmers, foresters, SMEs, etc., all have a key role to play.



Baiba MILTOVIČA, Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group

Ms Miltoviča warned that the urgent need to decarbonise will have **social consequences** and that it will be necessary to **balance the economic, social and environmental aspects**.



Lutz RIBBE, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Mr Ribbe, called for **radical changes** and drew attention to the fact that the European Court of Auditors has stated that the **reforms to the CAP will be insufficient to combat Climate Change**.



Evangelia KEKELEKI, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Ms Kekeleki, stressed the excessively **high price of food** in the EU and noted that it is cheaper to buy a new fridge, than to repair an existing one.



Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Finally, **Mr Trias Pinto** questioned the EC financial estimations for the European Green Deal, he noted the **barriers to public-private funding** and stressed that **indicators should be trustworthy**.



DIVERSITY EUROPE MEMBERS in the spotlight



Save the cow initiative and mountain farming in Bulgaria



© Shutterstock: Kire Galevski

Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)

President of the External Relations (REX) Section

Member of the Diversity Europe Group

The idea behind the **'Save the Cow' initiative** emerged a long time ago, but its implementation has only been made possible quite recently. In **Bulgarian mountain areas**, it is not uncommon for elderly people to no longer raise and slaughter their animals. To support older and rural adults, the **Mountain Milk association** supports them in finding new owners for their animals. It is not always easy to find young farmers willing to keep them on their small farms because most animals are old.

To give these animals a second life, the association found an alternative and innovative system. People can raise money individually or collectively to buy a cow, depending on their ability to farm cattle, their motivation and their daily need of dairy products.

A struggle to maintain and recognize mountain farming in Bulgaria

Moreover, **free-range pastoralism** in Bulgarian mountains maintains a natural balance in these areas between forests, pastures and meadows. If there are no animals to graze and the pastures are abandoned, they

gradually become overgrown and turn into forests. This phenomenon **modifies local landscapes and damages mountainous ecosystems**; the progressive disappearance of meadows for instance reduces the percentage of plants to pollinate for bees. Moreover, the abandonment of mountain grasslands favours forest fires. To fight land and farm abandonment, the Mountain Milk association is advocating for the **introduction of a Family Farm status in Bulgarian mountains**.

<https://www.euromontana.org/en/interview-of-the-month-meeting-dilyana-slavova-from-the-mountain-milk-association-bulgaria/>

OTHER NEWS FROM THE EESC

REX Section welcomes EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement

Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)

*President of the External Relations (REX) Section
Member of the Diversity Europe Group*

Mr Olivér Várhelyi, Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement (DG NEAR) participated in the **REX Section of the EESC** on 30 January and briefed Members on the **main priorities in the EU Neighborhood Policy**, namely: **sustainable economic development, strong democratic institutions and rule of law, in addition to good use of financial instruments**. The Commissioner updated the Members on the state of play of the consultation launched by DG NEAR on the future of Eastern Partnership (EaP), which will feed into the EaP Summit in June. Mr Várhelyi



Dr Komoróczy, EESC Member, Ms Slavova, President of the REX Section and Commissioner Várhelyi

also expressed his wish that, ahead of the Zagreb Summit, the **Council will agree on opening the negotiations**

with Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia.

Welsh third sector seeking post-Brexit relations

Tom JONES (UK)

*Former Member
of the Diversity Europe Group*

Despite the departure of the UK from the EU, third sector organisations in

the UK are determined to maintain and build on their close relations with counterparts across Europe. Within this context, on 5-7 February, the former UK Group III Member Tom Jones

hosted in Brussels a delegation of 25 NGO leaders from Wales. The Welsh third sector representatives participated in a meeting of the EESC's INT Section, chaired by Ms Ariane Rodert and also met with the President of the EESC's REX Section, Ms Dilyana Slavova. The latter underlined that a unique structure with UK civil society is necessary, focussing on agriculture, rural areas and trade of agricultural products.



Welsh NGO representatives hosted by former UK Member Tom Jones meet the REX President Dilyana Slavova



Building on ACP-EU relations

On 6 and 7 February the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee of the EESC, composed of European and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) representatives, met in Brussels.

The topics discussed related to the priorities of the new European Commission (2019-2024). Guest speakers included:

- **Mr Domenico Rosa**, Head of Unit - Strategic Partnerships EU-ACP and EU-African Union, DG Devco, European Commission
- **Mr Jonas Jonsson**, Head of Division - Pan-African affairs (AFRICA.5), European External Action Service
- **Ms Ewa Synowiec**, Director of Directorate D: Sustainable Development; Economic Partnership Agreements – African, Caribbean and Pacific, Agri-Food Trade

The REX Section of the EESC maintains regular contacts with civil society representatives in ACP countries at different levels, notably:

- Regular meetings of the **ACP-EU Follow-Up Committee**, composed of EESC members and representatives of ACP economic and social interest groups,
- **Regional Seminars** in ACP countries, providing a forum for discussing topics of common interest with civil society representatives in alternating regions,
- Triennial General Meetings of ACP-EU economic and social interest groups in Brussels.

The EESC also maintains regular contacts with the African Union's Economic, Social and Cultural Council.



Messrs Gajdosik and Somville, Ms Slavova and Ms Willems, Members of the Diversity Europe Group, together with ACP Members of the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee

Meeting of the Consumers and Environment Category of the EESC

On 3 February, the EESC's 'Consumers and Environment Category' held its first meeting of the year. Ms Janine Borg, administrator from the INT Section gave details to Members on the preparation of the European Consumers Day 2020, which will be held on 18 June in Zagreb (Croatia). Subsequently, Ms Malgorzata Posnow-Wurm, Deputy Director-General for Consumer and Marketing Law from DG JUST, presented the state of play of the "Directive on representative actions for the protection of the collective interests of consumers", followed by a debate with Members. Finally, the Category held a discussion on the EU Green Week.

UN event in New York

Ms Heinisch, Member of the Diversity Europe Group participating in the UN event in New York, together **German youth delegates** and **Mr Mark Kamperhoff**, representing the German Ministry for Families, Youth, Women and the Elderly.



GROUP III MEMBERS working on new opinions



Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (ES) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'European Green Deal Investment Plan' – [ECO/505](#)

Tommaso DI FAZIO (IT) is the co-rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Review of the Stability and Growth Pact' – [ECO/506](#)

Lutz RIBBE (DE) is the co-rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion '2030 biodiversity strategy' – [NAT/786](#)

Jan DIRX (NL) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'European Climate Law' – [NAT 784](#)

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL) is the President of the study group for the Opinion 'Just Transition Fund and amendments to the Common Provisions Regulation' – [ECO/504](#)

Seamus BOLAND (IR) is the President of the study group for the Opinion 'Decent minimum wages across Europe' – [SOC/632](#)

José Custódio LEIRIÃO (PT) is the President of the study group for the Opinion 'Revision of the Machinery Directive' – [CCMI/172](#)

Yves SOMVILLE (BE) is the President of the study group for the Opinion 'European Climate Pact' – [NAT/785](#)

Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the President of the study group for the Opinion 'Implementation of Free Trade Agreements 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018' – [REX/525](#)

Like us on facebook:



EESCdiversityeurope

Follow us on Twitter:



@DiversEESC

e-mail: gr3@eesc.europa.eu • **URL:** www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3

Editors of this edition: Susanna Baizou, Isabelle Henin, Fausta Palombelli, Enrica Nardello, Irina Jancova, Brigitte Carmosin, Lukas Jovanovic
Editor in Chief: Marc Beffort

Secretariat of the Diversity Europe Group,
European Economic and Social Committee,
99 Rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels
Tel. +32 (0)2 546 8893

Print
QE-AG-20-002-EN-C
ISSN 2467-4451
Web
QE-AG-20-002-EN-N
ISSN 2467-446X

EESC-2020-16-EN

THE EESC IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONTENT OF EXTERNAL WEBSITES

© European Union, 2019 • Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

For any use or reproduction of the "photos" and "illustrations", permission must be sought directly from the copyright holder(s).