

Connect

The newsletter of the Association of Former Members of the EESC

1

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Editorial by the AFM President

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**Biannual review may contain
certain anachronisms.**

Ουδέν κακό αμιγές καλού. As the ancient Greeks said, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Except of course at the moment there is a gale blowing for the people of Ukraine, and, to a much lesser extent, for the people of Russia and the other European countries. As for the good in all this, we have already seen considerable positives emerge with the EU's almost unanimous response to the COVID-19 crisis, and the plan for a genuine EU defence policy, rejected in the early 1950s, currently being put back on the agenda.

In 1946, Winston Churchill spoke about the need to move towards a kind of United States of Europe. And yet, due to a largely misleading campaign in the 2016 referendum, the UK is no longer a member of the European Union. Of scant consolation, but a great pleasure for us, is the fact that a number of British colleagues have now joined the Association of Former Members of the EESC (AFM), and I am delighted that Jane Morrice is now on the AFM bureau, following the recent elections.

Our European Union, despite all its shortcomings, has enabled us to live in peace and relative prosperity over the past seven decades. But history shows us that nothing is set in stone, that the human world does not exist in a static equilibrium. There have been and, unfortunately, will always be, individuals who assume the right to sacrifice the lives of others in the name of their personal ambitions, beyond all logic.

Only a strong, democratic and solidarity-based European Union, guaranteeing an area of freedom for all, can counter any belligerent inclination, wherever it comes from.

The European integration project will not move forward without the support of the vast majority of European citizens. To achieve this, decision-makers urgently need to put in place the policies that are needed, particularly in the areas of social policy, taxation, industrial policy and scientific research. At the same time, the media and social stakeholders must make every effort to inform citizens so that they do not take the promises made by populists of all kinds at face value.

As EESC members, we all worked more or less towards this goal. In the current situation, our status as former members must not be an excuse for not pursuing this path even more forcefully.

Georges DASSIS, AFM PRESIDENT

Time to push for a real restart



by **Christa SCHWENG**

President of the European Economic and Social Committee

I am particularly pleased to introduce the newsletter for this new term of office, and I would like to start by congratulating the newly elected members of the Association of Former Members (AFM) Bureau, in particular its new president, Georges Dassis, its vice-presidents, Béatrice Ouin and Filip Hamro-Drotz, as well as the other Bureau members, Jane Morrice, Laure Batut and Elisabeth Wolff.

It is greatly to be appreciated that so many EESC members continue, after the end of their term of office, to act as goodwill

ambassadors for the Committee, further promoting the values of participatory democracy and sharing their knowledge and experience.

Joining our efforts is certainly of great value in the current context, when Europe has just started to recover from the pandemic and has been hit by the terrible and unjustified war in Ukraine.

Growth prospects in the EU have recently been revised downwards compared to previous estimates, and inflation is projected to peak at historical highs in 2022. Supporting businesses and people is now crucial to save the economy and people's jobs and to leave nobody behind. Moreover, investments, especially under NextGenerationEU, need to support strategic reforms. We need to move ahead with the green and digital transitions and, at the same time, ensure the EU's strategic autonomy, especially regarding health, energy, raw materials and food.

Given the ongoing situation and political debate, I believe that the EESC can really bring substantial added value by focusing its work on three core issues: economic prosperity, social inclusiveness and environmental sustainability. These are the three pillars of

my presidency [priorities](#). I also believe in an open, values-based society that enables all civil society organisations (CSOs) to flourish.

Civil society organisations need to be more closely involved in implementing and monitoring the [national recovery and resilience plans](#), to ensure better policies and a greater sense of ownership. CSOs are also playing a key role in welcoming and helping the unprecedented number of people who have fled Ukraine. The EESC is helping them in various ways, [turning solidarity into action](#). Ukrainian organised civil society should also be supported in future, to play an active role in the country's reconstruction and on its path towards EU accession, which the EESC has called for.

Boosting the role of the Committee, as the representative of organised civil society, is particularly important in these times. In the context of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#), I was pleased to see that the role of civil society organisations, and of the EESC, were fully recognised. One of the Conference's proposals provides for «enhancing the institutional role of the EESC and empowering it as facilitator and guarantor of participatory democracy activities such as structured dialogue with civil society organisations and Citizens' panels». The EESC is, I believe, perfectly placed to play a role in fostering participatory democracy: it already has the mandate to advise EU institutions in practically all policy areas and has considerable experience in this field. It can also reach out and consult a huge variety of CSOs, networks and citizens across the whole EU. Thus, the Committee has the ambition and legitimacy to become a central hub for citizen and organised civil society participation.

In this context, I am looking forward to the continued cooperation between current and former EESC members, with common objectives in mind, which are stated in the Charter of the Association of Former Members rightly states as «the great task of uniting Europe» and «to achieve European integration».

I thank you for your steadfast partnership and support. United for the Future of Europe!

Christa SCHWENG
PRESIDENT OF THE EESC

Looking back to move forward



Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our work at an unprecedented scale and pace, bringing along a new set of vocabulary such as hybrid, remote and teleflex.

At the same time, this year was also a reminder that our world is more connected than ever.

Therefore, it is with great satisfaction and pride that I present to you [the main highlights of the EESC's work in 2021](#). This yearly exercise allows us not only to take stock of what we achieved but also how it echoed across Europe, on civil society organisations and on European policymakers.

The last year was indeed full of monumental events with global repercussions, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe. With a lot of local events and citizens' consultations, the EESC has once again proved its added value in engaging with citizens, thanks to its members and their extensive network of civil society organisations.

Besides engaging in dialogue, the EESC also has a record of providing concrete support to European civil society: indeed, in 2021 the Civil Society Prize gave 23 awards to European NGOs who made outstanding contributions to tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

In 2021, we also continued building on our relationship with other European institutions, and signed a new administrative cooperation agreement with the European Committee of the Regions. In doing so, the EESC continues to strive for better administrative practices, establishing a firm legal framework for long-term, efficient and effective cooperation.

Indeed, it has never been clearer that tackling big problems requires people working together across borders and institutions.

Given that last year the pandemic dominated our lives from day one, the EESC relentlessly continued to develop a virtual workplace, making a breakthrough in the way we organise our meetings and our work.

Indeed, throughout the health crisis, the EESC remained extremely active and focused its efforts on enabling the reinforcement of the measures then in place:

- new communication tools were improved;

- numerous remote and hybrid meetings and events were organised, including with large audiences and offering simultaneous interpretation where needed;
- distance-voting and the use of electronic workflows became standard practice.

All those efforts contributed to the EESC being able to fulfil its institutional role without disruption.

Let me finish by reiterating that we very much value the contribution of former members to consolidate the role of the committee in these challenging times for our countries and our citizens.

As I look back at previous years, I am convinced that the EESC will continue to occupy a key position as the bridge between policymakers and Europe's citizens.

Gianluca BRUNETTI

*SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE*

All united to address change



It is always a pleasure to address those who have been front-runners at the EESC for a time and are now continuing to support the work of the Committee even though they are no longer members.

As you know, the EU and the Committee are going through very difficult and uncertain

times. We do not know which way the wind will turn, but we are not naive and we are preparing for the worst. In the last six months, the Committee has adopted two resolutions on Ukraine and has put forward its views for the European Commission's work programme for 2023.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, with the resulting product shortages, supply-chain disruptions and global spikes in energy, raw materials and food prices, have shown the importance of building a **more resilient European economy**. This is why we are urging the Commission to put forward proposals that strengthen the business environment, improve working and living conditions and facilitate the transition towards a climate-neutral and circular economy.

We need to promote a strong industrial base and resilient international supply chains without raising barriers to trade and cooperation. EU energy policy must be realistic and not place an extra burden on vulnerable consumers and workers, nor undermine the competitiveness of European businesses.

Following on from the Conference on the Future of Europe, we have also embarked on an in-depth study of the future of the EESC. In line with the idea presented by Commission President von der Leyen of a «continuation of citizens' forums in the run-up to major legislative initiatives», which will be part of the State of the Union address in September. There is no other way than to strengthen our role and our relevance.

Rest assured - we will strive to ensure that we link citizens' panels intelligently with established structures and that the EESC will play a key role in this. Implementing this idea does not require reinventing the wheel or rewriting the Treaties.

What the EESC must propose is a very concrete step forward, using its structures, expertise, experience, network and mandate to strengthen participatory democracy and engage in open, transparent and regular dialogue with citizens, representative associations and civil society, thus addressing the EU's much-cited «democratic deficit».

Former members have an historic memory of the EESC and I am sure you will have ideas and comments on these new developments. Should you want to get involved, please do not hesitate to get in contact. My door is always open!

Stefano MALLIA

PRESIDENT OF THE EMPLOYERS' GROUP, MALTA

Europe is at a crossroads



Europe is at a crossroads, and how we react – how we tackle the challenges ahead – will define us. Will we stand united in solidarity, and work for a better world? Or will we run in disarray, consumed by our petty differences until we are all picked off, one by one? «Tomorrow has yesterday to borrow. A light to follow through the caves», says the song. And so our collective memory – our

knowledge and experiences – are our best asset for finding our way ahead. Our former members, experts both in their fields and in the EESC's work, know our past better than almost anyone, and thus bring to the table some of the best insights into the future. We hope that the Association of Former Members continues its work to keep this valuable network of colleagues and friends together and active to help us face our future.

In the Workers' Group, we know for certain that the united response Europe needs now will not happen without a strong society. This means freedom, solidarity, redistribution, workers' rights, decent working and living conditions, safety, health, and justice. Without them, our Union is a giant with feet of clay, surviving only because it does not move. Luckily, important steps have been made to change this. The directive on adequate minimum wages in the EU is a prime example of the collective effort to improve working conditions, strengthen collective bargaining, achieve fair living wages, and ensure social sustainability in our societies. 21 EU Member States currently have statutory minimum wages in the form of a legally binding minimum wage floor, covering almost all workers. The 6 remaining Member States do not have a statutory minimum wage, but minimum wages for a large proportion of the workforce are agreed collectively between the social partners for various sectors and occupations.

While it is too early to expect the proposed EU directive on adequate minimum wages to have an impact at national level (as EU Member States will have two years to transpose the EU directive on adequate minimum wages into national law) there

are already signs in some Member States that the proposed directive's contents are being taken into account.

It is for this reason that the Worker' Group is organising a topical debate on 30 September to converse with the political actors and trade unions who are starting to prepare possible modifications to the system or criteria for wage setting, or uprating wages in line with the international reference values mentioned in the proposal. Equally, we want to promote reflections among national actors on how collective bargaining can be promoted and bargaining coverage increased, as it is one of the proposed directive's other aims. Strong industrial relations and collective bargaining are key components of participatory democracy and a fundamental condition for a strong and social Europe.

Oliver RÖPKE

PRESIDENT OF THE WORKERS' GROUP ORGANISATION, AUSTRIA

Let's keep in touch for mutual benefit



At the beginning of June I had the pleasure of addressing the group of former EESC Members at their inaugural meeting this term.

As a Member myself since 2012 I recognised many familiar faces, many of whom were and remain my great friends. In the conversations afterwards it was nice to catch up, but also to learn that the zeal for – and enthusiasm

evident during – their EESC membership term still existed.

The purpose of maintaining a structure enabling former Members to connect with current Members is a lot more than just keeping social ties alive. As important as they are, there is a clear benefit on both sides. For current Members, the advantage is a clear link in terms of institutional memory. For former Members there is the link to the EESC, which allows continued learning and access to the latest information on a variety of issues – issues on which many continue to work.

In Group III, the Civil Society Organisations' Group, we are particularly welcoming of former Members. The broad range of issues represented by our group provides a unique set of challenges. Driven by the overarching aim of eradicating poverty, the group brings to the fore the voices of consumers, farmers, environmentalists, liberal professionals, rights activists and others, emanating from the work of civil society organisations. Bearing in mind that we are still dealing with the consequences of COVID-19 and the impending reality of climate change, along with the war in Ukraine, it is clear that for our group, these difficulties pose a serious challenge to our capacities. WB Yeats wrote in the poem «Easter 1916»: 'All changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born'. And here we are today, one hundred years since this poem was written, in the middle of significant change. At the same time, we are witnessing the terror of an illegal and unnecessary war, which has brought about terrible suffering.

In this context, the work of the Civil Society Organisations' Group is now more relevant than ever. Whether it is farmers,

environmentalists or consumers, the challenges are such that there is a high premium on solutions. Some of the questions demanding resolution include the following.

- How do we change to a zero-carbon emissions society, while maintaining a basic standard of life for our families?
- How do we devise health systems that can deliver in terms of pandemics and a growing older population, as well as delivering normal services?
- How do we preserve our democratic systems in the face of extreme populism?
- How do we deal with the epidemic of misinformation?
- How do we maintain the continuity of our European value system that has marked the cornerstone of our foundation? And there are many more.

Certainly, the threat to Europe is always there. We learned during the «Trump years» how unreliable the USA could be, particularly as a power on which to rely in terms of protection against foreign invasion, not to mention threats posed by the worst evils of digitalisation. Indeed, it is accurate to say that we are now living in times where the enemy is often invisible, and because of that they can use digitalisation tools to effect the most damage to systems that are essential to providing healthcare and other necessary services.

As a means of getting help from the wider Group III family, I would hope to make use of your skills and knowledge as former Members, as well as those of your organisations. I would like to meet Members on a regular basis and encourage regular connections with them. I would also invite Members to stay in touch by writing directly to me or the secretariat. By maintaining regular communication, we can forge sustainable links which may result in greater opportunities for everyone.

Civil society is still the place where most people can access services and advice, as well as real physical help. I believe that they will continue with this for future generations.

Séamus BOLAND

*PRESIDENT OF THE EESC'S CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANISATIONS' GROUP, IRELAND*

General assembly - 8 June 2022

After a two-year interruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Association of Former Members was able to resume its activities. 73 members took part in the general assembly, which was held on 8 June 2022.

Since the previous GA in 2019, two events have led to an increase in the number of members of the association: Brexit, which led 13 British members to join, and the renewal in September 2020, which brought 76 new members.

The assembly started with the election of the new bureau, which would stand for two years. The last elections were in 2019 and the previous bureau's mandate was extended as it had been impossible to meet. Roger Briesch, who was re-elected chair in 2019, had to resign for health reasons in December 2021. Vice-chair Grace Attard, who chaired the opening of the general assembly, filled in as interim chair.

The bureau has six members. All 17 candidates explained their reasons for applying. Following the election, three new members joined the bureau: Jane Morrice, a British member since Brexit who was vice-president of the Committee from 2013-2015, and two members who joined after 2020 – Georges Dassis, president of the Committee from 2015-2018 and Laure Batut, Quaestor of the Committee from 2010 to 2020. The three other members who were elected had already been part of the previous bureau: Philip Hamro-Drotz since 2019 and Béatrice Ouin, Elisabeth Wolf since 2017. The association therefore has a very new team at its helm.

Following the election, the bureau met to appoint a chair, Georges Dassis, a vice-chair/treasurer, Philip Hamro-Drotz, and a vice-chair for communication, Béatrice Ouin.

Work resumed chaired by Georges Dassis, who welcomed the Committee president Christa Schweng. She said that in these difficult times for Europe, with the war in Ukraine, and for the Committee that the support of former members was welcome. The secretary-general and group presidents then took the floor.

A discussion, introduced by an inspiring statement from Committee member Colin Lustenhouwer, former chair of the Association of Former Members, then gave many participants the opportunity to speak.

A message of thanks was sent to the chair Roger Briesch, who had been unable to travel for health reasons.

As with every general assembly, the day ended with a nice meal.

The annual study trip will take place from 14 to 18 September in Bilbao.

Beatrice OUIN
AFM VICE-PRESIDENT, FRANCE



Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is museum of modern and contemporary art. Bilbao, Basque Country

Thanks to Roger Briesch



Statement from the AFM bureau, approved by the members' general assembly

Roger, a former Committee president who the oldest members will remember, whose term of office was marked by his commitment to Europe, his social beliefs, his meticulousness and his willingness to compromise, became head of the Association of Former Members of the EESC (AFM), though he never sought the role. All those who have known him in this role can attest to his determination and his often expressed desire to make the AFM more than just a welcoming and friendly association and turn it into a useful tool for European organised civil society. He thinks that we former members are well placed, by virtue of our experience and beliefs, to be the «thorn in the side» of the Committee as we do not shy away from asking difficult questions, because we know this organisation and how it works and we understand, through experience, the complexity of European integration and the workings of its institutions.

With clear ideas on the objectives to be achieved, a lot of charisma to get everyone working together and the personal virtues of warmth and simplicity – particularly valuable during the annual trip – Roger has made our association attractive, as shown by the increase in the number of its members.

For all this and for so many other things, thank you Roger!

Beatrice OUIIN
AFM VICE-PRESIDENT, FRANCE

Survey results



Core outcome of the members survey

A written survey of AFM members was conducted prior to the General Assembly 2022. Thirty-two members responded. The survey was designed to clarify members' views on the activities of our association.

Responses clarified a strong, positive and enthusiastic attitude among the members overall. Many new members joined AFM at the end of the previous EESC mandate, and as a result of BREXIT. Core conclusions are as follows:

- all members appreciate AFM as a forum for EESC-related information, communication and contacts between the former members. Many members appreciate today's activities – an annual assembly and trip. Networking should however be strengthened to spur open communication among former members, as well as nationally and regionally (through WhatsApp etc.);
- efforts should be made to further strengthen contacts with the EESC, and to establish open (non-bureaucratic) information to members about topical EESC activities;
- the majority of members would be willing to engage in AFM-activities themselves, also to assist, where appropriate, in the EESC's consultative work. AFM would act as a «catalyst»;
- many members would be willing to contribute an article to the AFM newsletter «Connect», and arrange a trip to their country;

- it was suggested that AFM should also reimburse part of the accommodation costs related to AFM-meetings, and that the concept in the statutes about representing other members at a meeting (max two others per present member) should be changed.

The activities of the AFM Bureau were strongly appreciated, and the survey responses reflecting the interests and suggestions of former members will be considered.

Filip HAMRO-DROTZ

VICE-PRESIDENT AND TREASURER OF THE AFM

War in Ukraine in the eyes of a volunteer

Even though I listened to the deliberations and speeches of Putin addressed to the Russian nation, I didn't believe, until the very last moment, that Russia would invade Ukraine. And yet it has happened.

When I saw refugees queueing at the office of the police for foreigners, I took a decision: I can speak Russian, refugees from Ukraine do too, so I'm going to help. In the beginning, the refugees were mainly better-off. As the bombing of Kyiv and other cities intensified, trains from Slovakia and Poland started to arrive at Prague's main station every day, bringing mainly mothers with children, or just grandmothers or other parents with children. The mothers of these children – doctors, nurses, etc. – remained in the country to help and provide services.



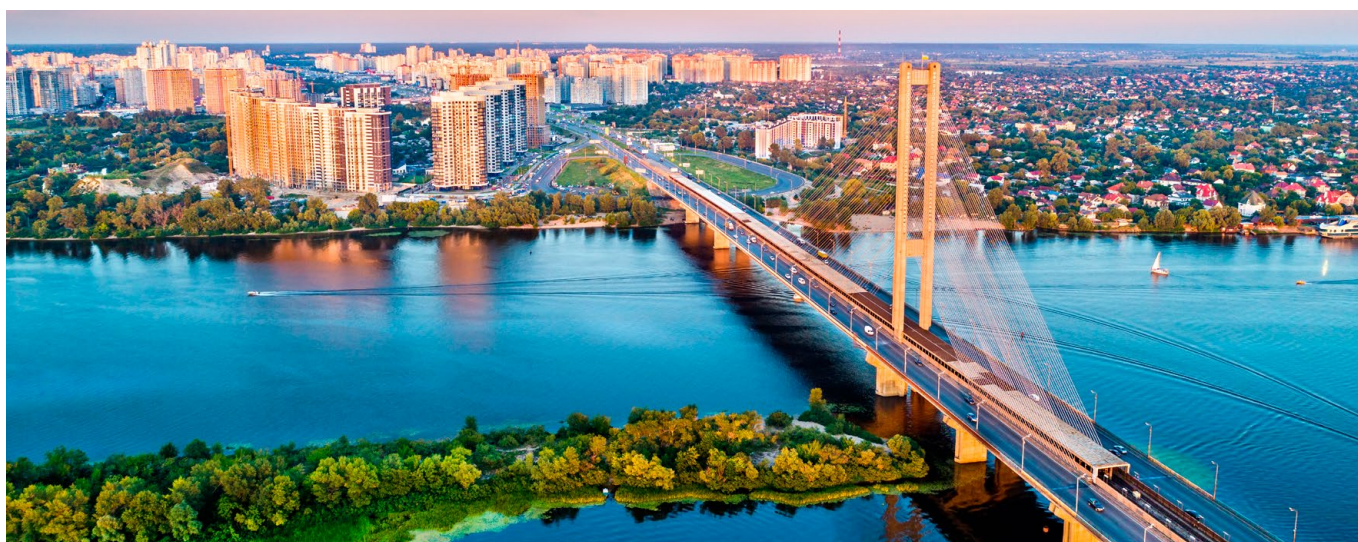
The journey took the refugees several days and often they had nothing with them except a few belongings, which they took into the various shelters. I acted as an interpreter in various situations: for patients at the doctor's, at the police station for visa procedures, for officials of the labour office and for others responsible for providing health insurance. I am very proud of the way the Czech Republic, even with the help of a large number

of volunteers and the financial support of millions of people, has managed this situation and continues to provide assistance.

In recent decades, the world has experienced several waves of migration caused by armed conflicts. Europe has not forgotten the war in the Balkans, for example. Reactions and views on conflict resolution and migration issues varied widely. However, I cannot recall a situation in which a president sending thousands of soldiers into foreign territory and forcefully bombarding not only military, but above all civilian targets there, would at the same time have issued a decree banning his own citizens (in this case Russian citizens) from using the word «war» to describe attack, under threat of a 15-year prison sentence.

Unfortunately, Putin's denial of reality, as well as massive propaganda, resonates beyond Russia's borders. I have personally lost some friends in my country and abroad. And what is still very painful for me is the fact that Putin is supported in this aggression by a prominent representative of the Russian Orthodox Church. I believe that the war in Ukraine will soon end and millions of women and children will return, with our help, to their restored homes.

Helena ČORNEJOVÁ
AFM MEMBER, SLOVAKIA



The South Bridge across the Dnieper in Kyiv, Ukraine

Brexit



View of Belfast, with the river Lagan, United Kingdom

The havoc wreaked by Brexit has shaken the very core of the constitutional standing of the United Kingdom. Two of the four UK nations voted to remain in the European Union and the debate in both is moving inexorably towards questioning their future in the UK as a direct result of the Brexit vote.

In Northern Ireland, the issue was addressed by the Protocol, which keeps the region in the EU Single Market, giving business the «best of both worlds». The unique position of NI in terms of the Good Friday Agreement, the ongoing peace process, EU citizenship and the land border with Ireland, warrants this 'special' treatment. But the Protocol is mired in controversy because unionists believe the creation of a border in the Irish Sea cuts them adrift from the rest of the UK and dilutes their British identity.

The Protocol has been an economic success story so far in that the region is doing better than any other part of the UK, with the exception of London. But the political controversy surrounding the Irish Sea border could discourage foreign investors from taking advantage of this dual market access. Meanwhile Scotland, which wanted the same EU trading arrangement as NI, was unable

to negotiate a similar deal. It is now facing the same economic downturn as the rest of the UK due to limited Single Market access.

The constitutional controversy reached a pivotal point in June, with plans for a Scottish independence referendum announced and moves afoot in London to override parts of the Northern Ireland Protocol. Against this backdrop, there is no time like the present for creative thinking to break the political log-jam and give both nations the best of all worlds. The extension of the NI Protocol to cover Scotland could do exactly that.

While the benefits for all parts of the British/Irish isles should not be underestimated, even a debate on the possibility of extending the Protocol to Scotland would help allay unionist concerns by moving the Irish Sea border to the Scotland/England divide and help focus minds in Scotland on the implications of a 'hard' border with England.

- In Edinburgh, by creating regulatory alignment with the EU Single Market, the extension of the Protocol could help Scottish independence supporters prepare for eventual EU membership. For those who do not support independence, it may help retain Scotland's place in the UK by giving them the same competitive advantage as Northern Ireland. It will also give specialised Scottish products, such as whiskey or salmon, direct access to a market of over 400 million people EU-wide.
- In Belfast, by moving the regulatory border away from the Irish Sea, east/west trade will flow more freely with only those goods coming directly from England being subject to customs checks. This will lessen the bureaucratic burden on NI businesses, big and small, and still allow unfettered access for goods travelling west to east from Northern Ireland to Great Britain. It may diminish the status of NI as the only part of the UK with dual market access but, by bringing Scotland into the equation, it would serve to reduce political tensions in the region.
- In London, there could be advantages and disadvantages. The extension of the Protocol could be seen as a way to diminish Scottish demands for an independence referendum by offering them the 'best of both worlds'. But business in the rest of GB may envy the advantage given to their northern neighbours and get 'buyer's remorse' when they see the benefits of EU Single Market access in terms of exports and investment. There is no doubt England and Wales would be at a disadvantage but, as the two nations which supported Brexit, they could look to the global opportunities which were promised.
- In Dublin, the 'value added' should be clear. By maintaining the 'status quo' on the island of Ireland, the Protocol makes space for the time needed for an in-depth debate on Northern Ireland's constitutional future. There is no doubt that the demand for a border poll would have been more vocal in the event of a hard Brexit. Recent statements from southern stakeholders imply a preference to learn the lessons from Brexit, and not run headlong into a referendum without greater understanding of the political, economic and social implications. Those whose ultimate goal is Irish unification may find less opposition if Scotland leads the way in the break-up of the UK.
- In Brussels, the possibility of a solution to the 6-year turmoil created by Brexit should be welcomed. The extension of the Protocol could lead to the coming together of Scotland, Ireland

and Northern Ireland in a 'Celtic Association' similar to BENELUX, which founded the EU. A Celtic Protocol could help prepare that process. It could boost the region's vast renewable energy potential and it could serve to regenerate ancient cultural links between Scotland and Ireland, particularly the Ulster/Scots connection and the relationship with the USA. This would bring the US into the equation, alongside the EU in a vital new partnership which could compliment the East/West/North/South, UK/Ireland balance set out in the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement.

Always reluctant to interfere in the internal politics of a nation, the EU could not stand accused if the request for a Celtic Protocol came from London, Edinburgh, Dublin and Belfast. There may be concerns that other EU regions, such as Catalonia or Corsica would follow suit, but the UK departure from the EU has set a damaging precedent which, given the self-harm inflicted by Brexit, is unlikely to be followed by other Member States.

If a Celtic Protocol isn't the solution, there could be another way. With the tide of UK public opinion turning in favour of rejoining the EU, a second referendum may put Brexit to bed once and for all. With the Protocols in place, Scotland and Northern Ireland would be the first in line.

Jane MORRICE

*AFM BUREAU MEMBER,
UNITED KINGDOM, BELFAST*

Europe faced with war: the urgent need for change

Europe has been profoundly shaken by Putin's military aggression against Ukraine. Consequently, the years to come will be completely different from those past – NATO's Secretary General has raised the possibility that the war could last for years.

Unprecedented challenges for Europe

Until now, the focus of the European project had been on building an economic market with a single currency and managing it as well as possible; an economic market intertwined with globalisation that promised us happiness, or in any case that would be promising. The latest crises, notably Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, were managed as well as they could be. They didn't undermine Europe's focus on its economic operation.

However, the European Union is now faced with a war on its doorstep, which is upending everything. Clearly, Europe has managed to respond quickly with unprecedented sanctions against Russia, the aggressor; unprecedented armed support for Ukraine; and with the improvised but proactive reception of millions of Ukrainian refugees.

But this war is set to continue for some time! And while the European Union has just granted Ukraine candidate-country status (along with Moldova which is also under threat), we find ourselves, whatever diplomatic language might be used, well and truly involved in an armed conflict, bordering on co-belligerence. This is also evidenced by Russia's intimidation tactics towards Lithuania, which is merely applying European sanctions to the railway corridor with the Kaliningrad enclave.

The European Union was not really prepared for such a situation, even with NATO to ensure Europe's protection, despite most European countries being insufficiently equipped in spite of their high levels of GDP, and the fact that the European Union lacks competence in this area.

We essentially owe this protection to the power of the US, which now holds almost half of the world's arsenal. However, apart from the fact that the United States is making us pay for our military dependence in numerous political, technological and commercial ways (including by obliging us to buy their equipment), their strategic priorities don't necessarily coincide with our own, given that their focus is on tensions with China in the Pacific.

For Europe, therefore, this is the brutal return to a continental cold war situation, worse still as we're dealing with a burning war of iron and fire involving countless deaths, atrocities against civilians, and massive destruction. We thought we had achieved peace more

than 30 years ago with the signing of the Treaty of Moscow in 1990, reunifying Germany and enabling the European accession of former Soviet satellite states. Now, at the end of these privileged 30 years, we are discovering that this happy time masked an ill-judged complacency, the cruel and extortionate costs of which are now being imposed upon us, whether we like it or not!

The urgent need for radical change

Because the reality is that Putin's war against Ukraine is about Europe, its democracy and its freedoms. He despises the European Union, which he will do anything to divide. Faced with such a threat, the EU is being forced into profound change. Finland and Sweden have already moved to join NATO. However, defining an autonomous European defence policy has also become a matter of urgency.

And of course many people, starting with our leaders, will cite growing Euroscepticism among voters to argue against such a prospect. However, the issue is being framed in the wrong light. All of the public debates on the future of Europe in recent years – first instigated by Commission President Juncker, then President Macron of France, and then the European Council – have shown that most of the criticism is not directed at the European project but rather at its lack of political strategy, decision-making efficiency, tax fairness and security protection.

Countering this would require a leap in integration, boasting truly integrated diplomacy, a united air, land and sea rearmament, and mutually preferential public procurement. Moreover, the technological recovery sparked by this rearmament would generate multiple industrial and economic benefits, boosting our capacities and competitiveness in energy, climate, biology, nuclear fusion, the cyber domain, robotics and space, among other areas.

Public opinion could well come to a consensus on these perspectives, as the public debates have already suggested. However, the lessons from these debates have been ignored, first and foremost by our leaders, and any EU-27 convention on Treaty change is at risk of producing a mouse-like response when what we really need is the dissuasive force of a tiger to counter the aggression of the Russian bear.



Einstein warned long ago that the biggest problem is not so much those who do evil as those who look on and do nothing. To avoid this scenario and its incalculable repercussions, there is no choice but to revive Europe and fortify its determination.

But how? Too many unknowns prevent us from predicting the future. But this shouldn't discourage us from calling for radical political change, as Martin Luther King once did in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington: «I have a dream!»

In our case, our dream is to reshape Europe in order to secure its future against the ruthless aggressors who threaten us today, all the while strengthening our capacity to maintain our position in the face of competition from the giants of globalisation. To begin, France and Germany could once again lead by example; an example open to all Europeans who are ready for it.

The current situation, both tragic and complex, presents as many risks of failure and division as opportunities to rebuild and recover. To those who would consider our dream – as pertinent as that of Martin Luther King – a fairy tale, remember Jean Monnet's words: «I am neither pessimistic nor optimistic, I am determined». This is the exact approach that Volodymyr Zelensky has chosen to take. Let's hope our leaders live up to his example!

Bruno VEVER

AFM MEMBER, FRANCE

Former member still involved

It's always a pleasure to come to Brussels and reconnect with old friends and I'm fortunate in being able to visit regularly in my role as chair of the Board of the Fair Trade Advocacy Office, based in Saint-Gilles. Not only does this give me a wide perspective on European social movements connected with international development, localisation, sustainable development and agriculture, it also gives me a practical reason to keep abreast of new EU legislative proposals on trade justice issues. Fair trade remains one of the strongest ways of linking the UK with the European mainland and it is fortunately an area where Brexit has had little impact.

Another area where I keep up to date with EU developments is the continually evolving provision of support and opportunities for older people – something which I feel sure will be close to the hearts of many AFM members. I chair an organisation in the north east of England which, through its 400 staff members, provides care in the home and numerous other activities as well as information for people in later life. This is an area where greater co-operation across Europe could provide substantial benefits as national and local initiatives are constantly developing new ideas, particularly in our world of increasing digitalisation, which is providing stimulating possibilities for staying in touch or bringing back memories.

For many years, as a Committee member and then through the CCMI, I actively worked on setting up a coordinated European Energy Dialogue. Some ten years ago we struggled to get this embedded in the Commission's thinking and I can't help but reflect on how useful this would have been in the present circumstances. But it's not too late to inform and involve European citizens in this and in the other big issues associated with building a sustainable future. During the COVID-19 pandemic I worked closely with TEN section HoU Eric Ponthieu, the main author, on producing a book: *The Climate Crisis, Democracy and Governance*. It sets out action points for governments to make the transition to a new, more sustainable world. It's available now in all good bookshops. This also enabled me to enjoy walks in the Ardennes with another former member of the secretariat – a part of Belgium which I find delightful.

At our recent AFM General Assembly there was a strong feeling that members could provide useful and substantial input to the work of the Committee. I would hope that the Bureau will be looking at practical ways this can come about – for example by allowing members to register specific interests enabling them to be informed at an early stage when applicable opinions are placed on the Committee's agenda so they can share their views with the rapporteur. If routes are available for members to contribute it will give the AFM added purpose and relevance.

Richard ADAMS

AFM MEMBER, UNITED KINGDOM

Climate change, still

Although the war in Ukraine and the Conference on the Future of Europe are the main topics in the news, we should not forget about climate change. I was invited to speak in a debate on the Green Deal and I would like to share the reflections I presented that day to Connect readers.

Many of us experienced life in the 1950s, before intensive agriculture, the invasion of plastics and air travel that was accessible to everyone.

When I was a child, we used to collect water from wells, water which was clean because there were no pesticides. Electricity was only used for light bulbs, refrigerators and radios, few people had phones and rural homes only had one car, if any. There was no waste, everything was recycled: water from washing dishes into pig swill, manure into fertiliser, newspaper into toilet paper. Preserves and jams were made at home and stored in jars that were reused year after year. Nappies were washed, sanitary pads as well. Anything we bought at the market was packed in paper and no one used deodorant. Milk and wine were sold in returnable glass bottles.

We have seen the world change and we have benefited from it. Bathrooms with hot water gave us the opportunity to shower every day and dry our hair with electric hair dryers. Ready-to-wear and synthetic fibres have made it possible to have a lot of clothes and keep up with the latest fashion. Washing machines, vacuum cleaners and dishwashers, electric ovens and microwaves, food processors, toasters, kettles and electronic coffee makers have reduced household tasks. Thanks to supermarkets and freezers, we don't need to shop every day, and ready-meals cut down on the daily drudgery of cooking. Specialisation of agriculture has increased yields and reduced the overall share of food costs in household budgets.

However, our energy consumption has steadily increased, whether it is for heating, to produce the electricity needed for these new machines, which now include televisions and computers, or to transport consumer goods that are now being manufactured all over the world as well as people travelling in cars – often two per household – trains or planes.

In 50 years, lifestyles have changed, the need for manual labour has decreased and it has become possible to travel.

This change in lifestyle has changed our environment: water, soil and air have been polluted. The rivers we used to be able to bathe in have been invaded by sewage discharge and chemicals. Air pollution has led to respiratory diseases. Biodiversity has shrunk, energy production has led to increased greenhouse gas emissions.

Since the 1970s, terms such as “pollution” or “hole in the ozone layer” have entered our vocabularies and scientists have started to warn of the consequences of this new way of life on our environment.

Year after year, we have seen an increasing number of disasters: oil spills, invasive algae, chemical (Seveso) or nuclear (Chernobyl) disasters. Our increasing energy needs have changed the geopolitical landscape: oil has replaced coal to become the lifeblood of our economy. It is the driving force, and those who have it have become the kings of the world.

After several decades of this rapacious energy economy, scientists warned about the “damage of progress”. A continent of plastic has invaded oceans and billions of tonnes of burnt oil and coal have produced gases that are dangerously warming our atmosphere. This global warming is a result of human activity and it is spiralling out of control. For millennia, forests have absorbed the carbon dioxide produced by human activity, but they are no longer able to cope with the task, especially as their capacity is being decreased by deforestation.

It should also be noted that the human population has increased: while it took humanity 30 000 years to reach one billion, it only needed 150 years to reach eight. The way of life in rich countries, which consumes so much energy, is not accessible to everyone – far from it – but everyone aspires to it.

Politicians became aware of the need to change the system when climate change began to produce devastating effects. Climate sceptics are now very rare, apart from Trump. But it is difficult to change, because everyone believes that it is someone else's job to change, no one feels responsible for a catastrophe on a global scale.

Pollution does not stop at borders, so action needs to be taken at European level.

Since the 1970s, the European Union has committed itself to the environment thanks to measures to protect air and water quality, preserve resources and biodiversity, manage waste, etc.



Environmental policy, which was not present in the Treaty of Rome (1957), has gradually become one of the EU's objectives.

At the end of 2019, the European Commission presented the European Green Deal, a roadmap to make the European economy sustainable and make Europe the first climate-neutral continent.

Climate change is the main threat to the future of humanity.

The Green Deal, which mobilises a trillion euro in EU and national funds, is a set of policies aiming to promote efficient use of resources by moving towards a clean and circular economy, capable of restoring biodiversity and reducing pollution.

As part of the European Green Deal, through the European Climate Law, the European Union has set itself a binding target of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. This requires current greenhouse gas emission levels to drop substantially in the next decades.

It is not a question of returning to pre-1950s lifestyles, with their hard manual labour, poorly heated or unheated accommodation and the lack of travel opportunities.

It is about building a new economy that is circular, and consumes little energy and raw materials. This means abandoning the old ways of making and producing, promoting new activities, learning to repair instead of throwing things away and exchanging items rather than buying new ones.

Supporting the change socially means training workers whose jobs are disappearing so they can take up new ones.

This change is already under way.

For me, three approaches are essential: research, legislation and individual responsibility.

Research: former members had the chance to visit one of the ITER programme research centres in Oxford, where scientists from 35 countries are working on harnessing solar energy and achieving on the ground the nuclear fusion which would make it possible to produce clean electricity in large quantities, but probably not before the middle of the 21st century. To achieve this, research funding is needed in this and many other areas, as many innovations are needed to preserve and restore the environment, whether it be to clean up oceans or polluted soils, we need to rely on science and technology.

Legislation: Industries are in no hurry to "green" their production – legislation is needed. Europe has already adopted many laws, ranging from the ban on plastic bags to the planned ban on petrol

engines. We will not get there without laws. The European Green Deal provides for a review of all legislation to determine which ones need to be amended in order to preserve the environment.

Individual responsibility:

This is what I would like to emphasise. As I said at the beginning, we all consume a lot of energy for heating, travel and to run all our electrical appliances. And we also need to take into account the CO2 emitted by what we purchase. When we buy clothes made in China, they have to be taken by boat, on huge container ships that consume a lot of oil. And so on.

For the climate transition to become a reality, each of us needs to make our own transition.

What does this mean?

Insulate your home, replace windows, move away from oil-fired boilers towards heat pumps and switch to electric vehicles. The media speak about this every day.

But making the transition goes even further. It's an attitude of taking back control of our consumption, asking ourselves about the carbon footprint every time we want to do something.

Sorting waste is good, but it's even better not to produce it. Buy in bulk, make your own laundry detergent with Marseilles soap and washing soda, grow your own vegetables, eat less meat and travel by train when possible, etc.

Everyone knows what needs to be done, but looking at trolleys coming out of the supermarket, it seems to me that not very many people have started their transition: there is water in plastic bottles when we can drink it from the tap, shower gel in plastic bottles when bar soap works just as well, readymeals with too much packaging which are bad for our health and the environment, etc. There is room for improvement.

Making the transition does not mean returning to the 19th century. Vegetable gardens in permaculture are much more productive and much less tiring than the gardens our grandparents kept. It means thinking of saving energy, thinking in terms of the circular economy, repairing instead of throwing things away and asking ourselves every time we are tempted to buy something whether we could find it second hand. This is true for clothing, tools, phones and computers. We could also share washing machines, vacuum cleaners or drills which are only used a few hours a week.

Local elected representatives also have their part to play as trailblazers. They can reduce street lighting at night, install solar panels on schools and town halls, avoid digital advertising panels, etc.

The transition needs to happen, so we should start right away!

Beatrice OUIIN

AFM VICE-PRESIDENT, FRANCE

A democratic and efficient Europe

The events of recent years, up to the war in Ukraine, to which Europe has responded well, call for clear, well-defined choices to be made to enable the EU to take both internal and international decisions faster and more efficiently. The time for blocking and continual procrastination is over - it also happened at the June European Council, with serious consequences for European citizens and businesses.

What is needed here can only be pursued and achieved by a **group of pioneering countries** rather than the current 27, as we have reiterated on several occasions.

To this end, the most important thing is to **achieve a political union**, a federal structure, made up of a group of countries that have adopted or are adopting the euro, which acts as a trailblazer and creates traction, as happened with the EEC in 1957.

A European political player on the world stage, with legislative and government powers, with common, shared and transparent political responsibility in certain areas, including, within the political union, a **social union**, a **reception union**, a **health union**, an **economic union**, an **energy union**, a **foreign, security and defence policy union**, together with a **fiscal and budgetary union** that makes it possible to achieve common policies.

At the same time, the current **Union** also needs to be **reformed**. For example, we need to: abolish unanimity voting, simplify its governance, give Parliament the power of initiative, transform the Council into a Chamber of States, divide responsibilities between the Union and Member States better, complete EMU if the political union is not pursued, improve the division of powers between the Union and the Member States, etc.

In addition, on the basis of the European Council recommendations from 23-24.06.22, a «**Confederation**»/**European Policy Community** can be envisaged. A «platform for political coordination for European countries across the continent», to promote dialogue and cooperation on issues of common interest, without replacing EU policies and decision-making autonomy.

In conclusion, it should be noted that a **two-speed Union** needs to be refined and consolidated, by creating a **political union** of a group of pioneering countries with a **new constitutional treaty**, should the 27 fail to reach agreement on the basis of the current Treaty.

This goal must be achieved as soon as possible by means of a **Convention**, to be convened in the near future by an extraordinary European Council, on the basis of the European Parliament's proposals for amending the Treaty. In the event that the initiative fails or is further postponed, we believe that a proper Conference is needed with a mandate to give the Union a new foundation.

Moreover, if the political - federal - union is not implemented or is further delayed, Treaty changes must also include endeavours to complete EMU, which must on no account be put back again, given that the euro area should have been completed long ago. However, it must be done organically rather than piecemeal, as has been the case for a long time. This is a **crucial European matter**, which cannot be put off again: we are all well aware of the implications, which are at play once again in this period of war.

Carmelo CEDRONE
AFM MEMBER, ITALY

Food security takes on a new significance: «Agriculture needs peace – Remembrance creates values»

«Then the crop was harvested, and in a ceremony attended here by leaders and families, it was baked into bread. Special bread to remember the blood spilt and to remind people of the value of peace, both materially and spiritually. I was given a handful of the flour and I'll treasure it, to remind me that it is important to remember and that we have, as Europeans citizens, much in common and a great deal to defend.»

These words are taken from «In Between», written by farmer Tom Jones from Wales, who was a member of the EESC for a number of years». Mr Jones was part of a NAT delegation that went to Berlin during Green Week and also visited the famous Berlin Wall memorial on Bernauer Straße, where he learnt about the European project PeaceBread (FriedensBrot).

PeaceBread was founded in 2012. Along with 12 partner countries from along the former Iron Curtain, the association focuses on the contribution of sustainable agriculture to peacekeeping. This

includes establishing and maintaining an extensive network. The annual highlight is a conference that includes ministerial meetings, a civil society assembly and a formal public PeaceBread ceremony. The public launch on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of the Iron Curtain in Berlin in 2014 was a great success. An EESC delegation, including the then EESC presidents Staffan Nilsson and Henri Malosse, has been actively involved in every conference since then, each of which has taken place in a different country. Every conference, whether in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania, has attracted public attention and involved political and civil society partners from the 12 countries that have a shared experience of separation and trauma due to the Iron Curtain.

Adalbert KIENTLE

AFM MEMBER, GERMANY



Spinelli, me and my honeymoon

The first time I met Altiero Spinelli did not go well. As a young researcher at the European University Institute in Florence preparing a PhD on the history of the European Movement, I had read about Spinelli and arrogantly thought to myself – at last, someone who thinks like me! Needless to say, his “back story” was a lot more prestigious.

An anti-fascist militant against Mussolini, he was arrested in 1927, imprisoned for ten years and confined for a further six on the island of Ventotene where, in June 1941, he and fellow prisoners Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni clandestinely drew up a Draft Manifesto “For a Free and United Europe”. The Ventotene Manifesto for a post-war democratic European Federation was a key rallying call of the Italian and European Resistance and the European Federalist Movement. Sadly, post-war, their radical blueprint for European Federation was neglected and usurped by the neo-functional Jean Monnet model. Spinelli was nonetheless rightly considered a “pioneer” and “founding father” of the European Union. He played a significant role in post-war politics and was a European Commissioner from 1970 to 1976. After that, at the time I met him, he was an Italian MP (Deputato della Repubblica Italiana) for the



Altiero Spinelli

my best friend’s wedding the previous year. When I got to Rome, I was boiling hot and went for a drink not far from where his lecture would take place. I went to a small bar at Largo Argentina, just off Piazza Navona. As I sunk a beer, I heard the shutters slam down all around. I dashed outside to see what the commotion was about and got entangled in the front-line of an illegal demonstration that was soon fired at by the police with exploding teargas canisters aimed directly at us on the square and by violent fascists shooting at us from a windowsill above. There were several casualties, and one student girl was tragically killed. I managed to get away, got to Spinelli’s lecture in a state of shock and excitement and ludicrously

“Independent Left”, not yet a directly elected MEP.

My meeting with him was not pre-arranged but improvised – not a good idea! It was 12 May 1977, on a sunny day in Rome. He was to give a lecture that evening and I thought I could introduce myself at the end. For some reason, I preposterously wore a three-piece suit that I had bought for

presented myself at the end of the meeting. He was rightly and clearly annoyed that I had the presumption he would be interested in me. I don’t think he was too impressed, either, by my three-piece suit! I left the room and Rome, embarrassed and forlorn...

Fortunately, a few weeks later, my thesis director, Professor Walter Lipgens, kindly put me in touch with one of Spinelli’s federalist soulmates, Andrea Chiti Batelli. We had a long and deep conversation about my research on Italian federalism and my serious understanding of, and sympathy for, Spinelli’s constituent vision for Europe. He promised to put in a kind word for me and arrange a meeting sometime in the near future.

Time passed and not much happened ... except that I fell in love with a beautiful Florentine and got married soon after, in January 1978. We went on our honeymoon to her parent’s holiday home in Ortisei (Alto Adige). We couldn’t ski but ably sledged around all the surrounding hills and mountains, catching a chill and a slight cold. But it didn’t matter, because we were in love ... and I had completely forgotten about Spinelli!

In the middle of our honeymoon, Andrea managed to get in touch with me. Spinelli wanted to see me, forthwith, in Rome. We had to leave immediately and could stay at Andrea’s place, on the outskirts of the capital. My understanding wife kindly agreed and we hurriedly took the night train from freezing Bolzano to sunny Rome! Our colds disappeared and Andrea was delighted to host us, celebrate together and imbibe rather a lot of his delicious Sicilian wine!

The next day, Andrea accompanied us to our luncheon appointment with the great man himself. Spinelli, I learned, loved his food, and this was Andrea’s yearly “feast” with him. We all met at a long table with other federalist friends at a wonderful fish restaurant, La Rosetta, just behind Piazza Rotonda and the Pantheon. I sat next to Spinelli who served us and was utterly charming and fascinating. He loved sincere, like-minded company, and my wife and I were completely in awe of him! What a privilege it was. Our honeymoon took on a totally new dimension. He invited both of us to meet up with him again, the day after, Tuesday 17 January 1978, in his parliamentary office.

We met and discussed all morning. He very much liked the fact that in my research I had exposed the fundamental and disastrous split within the post-war federalist movement between the “Hamiltonian” constitutionalist wing in favour of political federation, represented by Spinelli, and the “integral federalist” wing, represented by ex-Vichy corporatists and nostalgists for the so-called “living forces”. This split seriously undermined the federalist

input to the grand Congress of Europe in May 1948 and initially hampered the federalist development of the European Movement. To my astonishment, at the end of our cordial discussion, he handed me a manuscript, freshly typed by his daughter Diana, of his personal "European Diary" for those immediate post-war years, published some time later by il Mulino. I was the first historian bestowed with this honour. He had confidence in me and kindly recorded in his diary for that day that he considered me to be an authentic "spinelliano."

After our long talk, Spinelli accompanied us to the lift where we briefly met his wife, Ursula Hirschmann, who, those thirty-seven years previously, had bravely smuggled the Ventotene Manifesto out of the island on the back of cigarette papers, concealed in the false bottom of a tin box. She was frail and dignified. Spinelli adored her.

The Spinelli "European Diary" was a very precious primary source material for my PhD, which I completed a few years later, extracts of which were published in "Documents on the History of European Integration" (Walter de Gruyter 1991). Unfortunately, this was too late for Spinelli, who sadly died in 1986.

In the intervening years, we stayed closely in touch. He was, of course, elected to the European Parliament in 1979. During the same campaign, I worked for an avowedly federalist Labour candidate in the UK, Ernest Wistrich, who was not elected. Shortly after, I worked for Brian Key MEP, who was a close supporter of Spinelli in Parliament and in the renowned "Crocodile Club" (another British MEP who supported Spinelli was a certain Stanley Johnson...). I later went back to Rome and met up again with Spinelli on a few occasions. In his diary for 18 February 1982, he recorded that he wanted to "take me under his wing" and that he must find the time to read my thesis. However, he was by then totally absorbed with his draft Treaty Project for European Union, still inspired by Ventotene and the idea of the European Parliament becoming a constituent assembly. I was proud to be associated with him and his project at such an early stage. On 23 July that year, when he thought that his much-accomplished parliamentary assistant, Virgilio Dastoli, could be leaving, he wrote in his diary that he might invite me to replace Virgilio. I knew nothing of this at the time. Virgilio of course stayed and was a loyal and successful aide to Spinelli as he steered

his Draft Treaty through the European Parliament by a massive 237 votes to 31, with 43 abstentions on 14 February 1984. By then, I had become an EU official at the European Economic and Social Committee, doing what I could in that more modest setting to rally support for Spinelli.

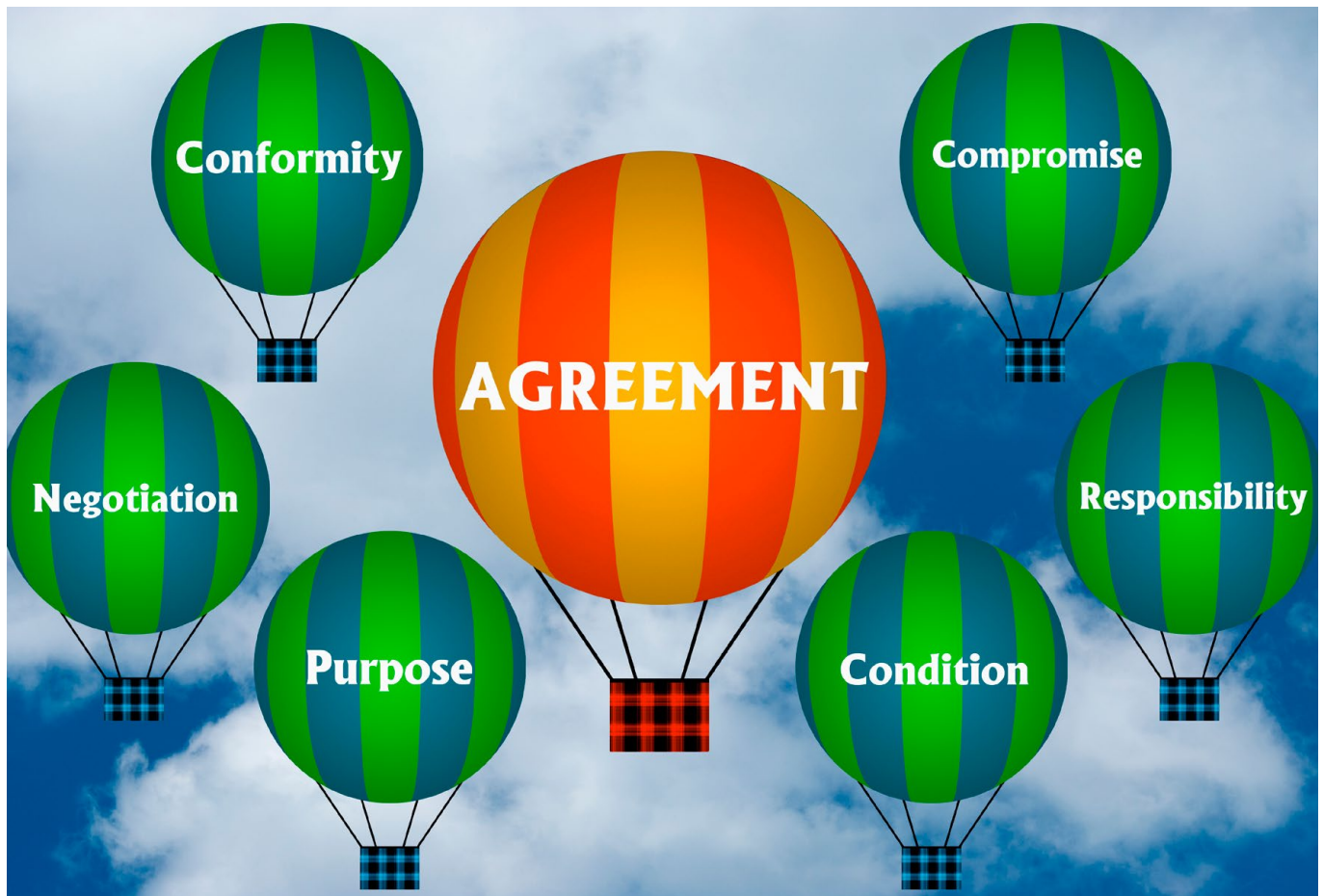
Sadly, I didn't try to see Spinelli in person those last few years. He had become so admired and famous that I felt it was inappropriate to profit from our earlier times together. The last time I saw Spinelli in person was actually on 11 September 1982 at a Festa dell'Unità gathering at Tirrenia. He was on a panel of distinguished politicians rambling on and he was extremely bored. He started to cut out paper dolls with his programme, then spotted me in the crowd and called me over. We chatted amiably and he left me his new business card, on which was written "Ciao Hick". I still have it and treasure it. His handwriting was appalling! So much so, that when his second "European Diary 1976-1986" was typed up and published, I am listed in the index, not as Alan, but as Yvonne Hick! I think we both would have enjoyed the joke!

I always remained a loyal "spinelliano" and will never forget how he changed my life ... and my honeymoon.

Alan HICK, alias Yvonne

AFM MEMBER, FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE COMMITTEE

Creative compromise



The war

This is not the first time that humanity is experiencing a war such as the one taking place today in Ukraine following its invasion by Russia. In this war however, for the first time, we are experiencing something else – unprecedented strong regional tension – which hinders the prospect of a compromise to end military operations and achieve peace. In essence, what has happened is that the conflict has gone from being bilateral to multilateral, adding to all disputes between Russia and Ukraine, the disputes that the West has with Russia.

Given the general geopolitical context, events could not have evolved differently. For quite some time, we have allowed choices and policies to grow and develop that are clearly problematic for peaceful coexistence in the region.

On the one hand, we have ignored the long-term stress Russia has experienced in witnessing NATO missiles ever closer to its capital. We have also ignored the Russia's perspective on the «business» of our dependence on its natural gas.

On the other hand, we have supported «nudges» given to Ukrainians to follow the same path as almost all peoples of Eastern Europe – all those who previously belonged to the Warsaw Pact and became members of the EU and NATO after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989.

Consequently, developments in Ukraine are a continuation of these choices of ours that led the EU to its major enlargement towards the east at the start of this century.

A dogmatic dispute

It was this EU enlargement, debated intensively at the time, which added an additional dispute to the Union's internal dialogue. This dispute concerned the perspective of EU-Russia relations, which reflected a block between old and new members of the EU. A dispute which was clearly dogmatic from the point of view of its former Eastern member countries.

The references above are made to show the extremely negative atmosphere of relations between Russia and its former allies under the Warsaw pact. An atmosphere that eventually seeped into the EU and characterised general EU-Russia relations, putting an end to Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik – the policy adopted and followed towards Russia by all EU-Member States, until its major enlargement.

As a result, the conflict in Ukraine took the shape we see today, implementing third-party plans and serving – I must say intelligently – their interests. The shape of this conflict shows the EU currently «cooperating» with Russia's obvious intention to build walls at its western borders along the lines of the Cold War era, revising its geopolitical orientation overall.

Of course, walls do not just imply protection. They also represent isolation. An isolation which will in any case have a price to pay, making the surrounding area's future uncertain and dangerous on many levels.

Let us make it clear that these walls do not directly affect other parts of the world – the US being no exception. It should also be stressed that the walls in question in no way affect Russia in terms of costs as they do us. Lastly, it should be emphasised that in a cost-benefit context, we are the only losers – as opposed to all our other large competitors (+economically) in the world.

Do we have enough time?

The pace and speed of current developments in general, particularly the conflict in Ukraine, mean we do not have the luxury of time required by our democratic sensitivity and our operational procedures. We must discern, highlight and deal with the overarching issue: the need for the EU to survive, under the terms and in the context of what it has achieved so far – in whatever form – and its values.

Essentially, we must also deal with this very complex problem as we do all or small and large internal problems. In other words, we must see past deadlocks, develop dialogue and seek creative compromise. A creative compromise without new walls, embargoes on energy and isolation on both sides. Can we do this? Do we have enough time?

Ukraine – with its fighting and martyrdom – cannot survive in a Europe which is productively expensive, in other words a Europe which is economically defeated and left out of the global competition race as a result of energy.

Endurance struggle

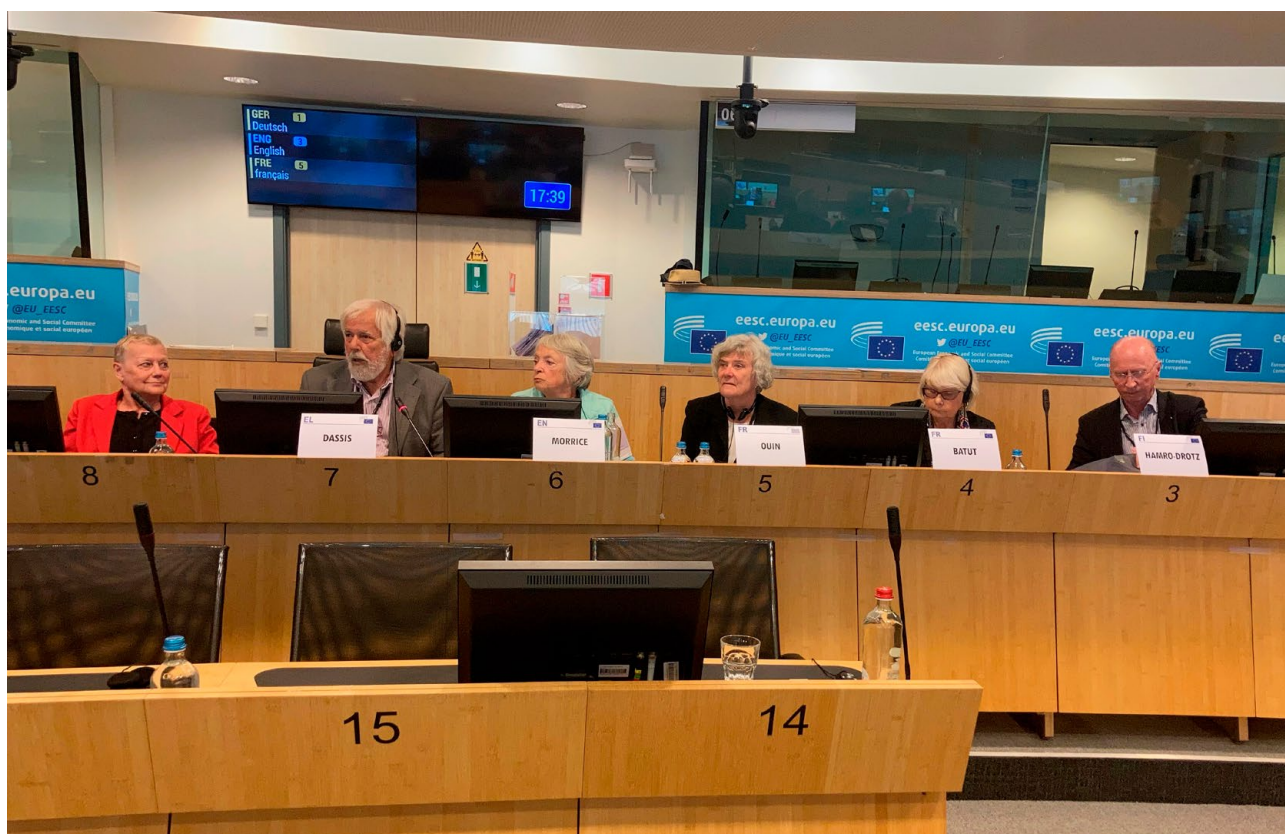
Of course, there is also the problem of Russian revisionism, which is similar to that of Turkish revisionism. These are problems we do not forget. In fact, they become part of our endurance struggles; of our problems such as the conflict between our democratic sensitivity and authoritarianism. In other words, problems which require long-lasting physical and mental strength; the multi-faceted, strong forces of a healthy and robust organisation.

Or perhaps we are facing the beginning of the end to an endurance struggle? The beginning of the end to a total and blindly self-destructive conflict?

Now is the time for us to find out. Just as it is time for us to find out «the final extent of our victory».

Christoforos KORYFIDIS
AFM MEMBER, GREECE

Christoforos Koryfidis was a member of the European Economic and Social Committee for thirteen years and, among other things, he participated as co-chair in the EU-Hungary Joint Consultative Committee.



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