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Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin



**ONE YEAR ON, EUROPE
STILL IN THE GRIP OF WAR**

FOREWORD

Séamus BOLAND (IE)

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Europe, one year in the grip of war



Séamus Boland © EESC

In this February 2023 edition we are extremely conscious of the events that transpired this time last year.

On 24 February 2022, Russia contravened

the principle of state sovereignty in international law when it invaded Ukraine, starting a vicious war which has already cost thousands of lives. A war that seeks to destroy the whole infrastructure of a country. In a war that shows no differentiation between military targets and civilians, how is it possible to witness a country destroying apartment blocks, hospitals and schools without any regard for life, and not conclude that these actions are war crimes? This is a war that has shown little respect for the many conventions designed to prevent human suffering, despite condemnation from the United Nations. It is a great failure of humankind not to resolve disputes through peaceful methods.

This war has also demonstrated the essential role of civil society organisations around the world in bringing relief to the people of Ukraine. It should be remembered that all of the – mainly volunteer – assistance is supported by organised civil society groups, which do their utmost to maintain this support, while ensuring the safety of all involved.

Ukraine's self-defence represents the right of all nations to defend their existence. The resistance of the Ukrainian people clearly surprised

the world and they are still suffering. This war also represents a failure to contemplate peaceful solutions. This failure needs to be addressed immediately and should start with initiatives led by the United Nations. If peaceful channels are not pursued, the world faces a long war in which thousands more will needlessly lose their lives.

European Year of Skills 2023

As we all know, 2023 is the European Year of Skills¹. Hopefully this means that the European institutions and Member State governments will tackle the many persisting inequalities for people who are unable to access available skills programmes. There are numerous socio-economic groups for whom we fail to secure access to proper skill training. Among the reasons these groups are marginalised is that they belong to ethnic groups, have a disability, or suffer traumas caused by poverty and inequality.

It should also be noted that skills in the social sciences are often forgotten. Skills required in the care, health and well-being sectors are essential for improving our society. As we discovered during the COVID-19 pandemic, skills in the health provision and research domain were tested at a time when much of what was needed was not there. So let's ensure that in this Year of Skills we remember that a functional economy cannot exist unless we have the sociological skills to support it.

Fintan Farrell and Padraig Walshe

Finally, I would like say a few words for two friends and colleagues who recently passed away, and remember

all the good they did for society. I would like to pay tribute to Fintan Farrell, former director of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN). From Ireland, Fintan consistently defended many issues of the least fortunate in society. He leaves behind an incredible legacy at the EAPN.

I would also like to remember Padraig Walshe, a former Member of our Group. A farmers' leader in Ireland and former president of Copa-Cogeca, Padraig spent his life advocating for a fairer deal for farmers.

May they rest in peace.

Séamus Boland

1. European Commission, European Year of Skills, <https://europa.eu/!WFC99c>

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ONE YEAR ON, EUROPE STILL IN THE GRIP OF WAR

Refugees with disabilities facing segregation and steps to improve their inclusion

Pietro Vittorio BARBIERI (IT)



*Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group
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Pietro Vittorio Barbieri © EESC

President, Centre for Autonomy (Centro per l'Autonomia)

We have all mobilised to take in **Ukrainian refugees** since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. By “all” I mean Italian organised civil society in the broadest of terms. Those who did not welcome refugees into their homes collected money, goods, medicines and all other products that could be useful in this situation.

Italy has been home to quite a number of Ukrainians for some time now and they have been fundamental in acting as a bridging point for their acquaintances, friends and relatives, and also as interpreters.

Faced with this situation, many from **organised civil society in Italy** gave their immediate and utmost attention to those with disabilities, older people and migrants residing in Ukraine. A great many **people with disabilities** arrived through ordinary channels, such as the Italian Red Cross, pacifist caravans, volunteer groups (including medical volunteer groups) or by their own means.

The European Disability Forum¹ provided a space within which this experience could be compared to other similar experiences. All had at least one problem in common: the host states' tendency to **find easy, segregated solutions for refugees** with disabilities. Emergency policies that were never made accessible and inclusive as required under Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)², coupled with mechanisms that never really changed within the bureaucracy of individual countries, have pushed those with disabilities from Ukraine into institution-

alising accommodations. We found ourselves struggling to keep refugees with disabilities out of such places.

However, another problem then arose: the **standard reception system is not accessible**, to any degree. A **new system** therefore had to be built, tested only now despite the fact that refugees with disabilities from other countries had already been received in the past. The hope is that this system, which is now finally in line with CRPD obligations, will not be scrapped once the emergency situation in Ukraine comes to an end. To the contrary – the hope is that it sticks.

1. European Disability Forum, <https://www.edf-feph.org/>

2. United Nations, CRPD, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>



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Nearly one year in, what lessons should we learn from the war in Ukraine?



Małgorzata Anna BOGUSZ (PL)
President, The Kulski Foundation for Polish-American Relations

Małgorzata Anna Bogusz
© Małgorzata Anna Bogusz

Almost a year has passed since Russia launched its full-scale **invasion of Ukraine**, but still not all of us fully understand the vulnerable situation all EU countries find themselves in.

In order to **bring the conflict to an end** quickly, we must understand the problems we are facing as a community. This is why I would point out this idea, frequently mentioned in the public sphere, that it is only Vladimir Putin and his inner circle that should be seen as a threat and that the Russian people are innocent victims of the policies of the current Russian authorities. This perception of the current situation is a typical example of wishful thinking. You just have to look at statistics and images from Russian cities to see that the overwhelming majority of Russians support the actions being carried out in Ukraine and that their

attitude towards minority rights, including the LGBTQ+ community, does not correspond in the slightest to European standards and goes against the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)¹.

We need to be particularly sensitive about **human rights** and the fight to preserve them not only within the EU but also outside it. Every war comes to an end eventually and as the European community we will have to come up with a new way of cooperating – both with Ukraine and with Russia. And this will, in my view, be a **key role for NGOs**, which have conducting dialogue and building relationships from the bottom up in their DNA – putting people whose voices are not heard enough in day-to-day life first.

This will be a **lengthy process**, but one of its main objectives should be to facilitate the smooth transition of social organisations to the European family, to **adapt to European standards** so that they can get to know the European Union's legal framework as quickly as possible. I am mainly referring to **actors from Ukraine**, whose society

and authorities want to be integrated into European society. In Ukraine – despite the ongoing war – such pro-European organisations exist, and many of them also have offices in EU countries. The EU has a wide range of tools at its disposal to achieve this objective such as study trips, scholarships or transnational initiatives. I'm not forgetting about Russian society – it is up to the Russians to define their identity and position on a community of values and respect for human rights.

The war is not over yet, therefore our priority must be to do everything possible to put an end to the violence.

We must stand firm in supporting Ukraine, while calling on the European Commission to provide systemic support to NGOs and relieve them of overly complicated bureaucratic obligations.

1. United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

10 million people have been provided with humanitarian aid, but the need is much bigger

Maksym DOTSENKO

*Director General, National Committee, Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS)*¹

The situation in Ukraine is now rapidly deteriorating as a result of the war and the continued missile attacks.

Every day, we have to solve an extremely difficult task: how to work even more effectively in conditions of **war and aid** the growing number of affected people. The significant complexity of the situation in Ukraine is



Maksym Dotsenko © URCS

compounded by regular power outages, against the backdrop of a winter drop in the average daily temperature. The need for evacuation, for heating

in people's homes, for restoration of infrastructure, and provision of additional power sources to the population is increasing.

Since 24 February 2022, **more than 10 million people have been provided with assistance** from the Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS), including beneficiaries who have received in-kind or cash support; beneficiaries of household reconstruction/shelter; people evacuated from the location of active military hostilities; people trained in first aid and mine danger;

and those who have received psycho-social support.

The **cash and voucher assistance** is always the primary demand and allows us to cover the most urgent needs quickly. However, it doesn't solve long-term issues concerning destroyed houses and critical infrastructure. Therefore, the URCS plays an essential role in response to this challenge and has constructed around 8 000 square metres of modular housing.

Together with the Ukrainian authorities and in cooperation with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, we have already started the process of **building temporary houses** for internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Chernihiv, Zhytomyr, Zakarpattia and Kyiv regions.

Thus, tens of thousands of Ukrainians who have suffered from the war will be able to settle in temporary shelters and start adjusting their lives.

We are also supporting **repairs to hospitals**, especially for children, and mental and physical rehabilitation.

Currently, we are also paying special attention to healthcare needs coverage through a developed network of Mobile Health Units. These units operate across 20 (out of 24) regions in Ukraine, providing home-based care and mental health programmes.

The URCS has provided **psychologi-**

cal assistance to more than 250 000 people. In addition, we are constantly providing first aid training to the population, with almost 100 000 people being trained to date.

Our **home-based care programme** operates all over the country. This involves more than 627 employees of the URCS, who help the elderly in their homes. These are usually people who are bedridden and do not have relatives who can take care of them, for example by bringing food or helping with hygiene procedures. And the URCS takes care of such people – there are currently more than 4 000 of them.

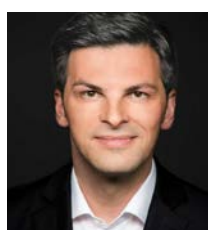
The scope of the Red Cross's work speaks for itself; a lot of assistance has already been provided, but we understand that the need is much bigger than that and the consequences of the crises will continue for years. And although the country is still in the immediate response phase, we as a humanitarian community already have to think about the **next steps** to recovery and reconstruction and rehabilitation in a coordinated manner.



Work of Red Cross Emergency response team at the site of the explosion, Vinnytsia, 2022 ©URCS

1. The Ukrainian Red Cross Society was recognised by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on 29 September 1993, helps vulnerable groups of population, and develops community's capability to prevent and overcome humanitarian and social crises: <https://redcross.org.ua/en/about-urcs/mission/>

Liberal professions: giving Ukrainian refugees job opportunities



Martin Böhme © Martin Böhme

Martin BÖHME (DE)
*Managing Director,
Rhineland-Palatinate Chamber of Engineers
Managing Director,
Rhineland-Palatinate Association of Liberal Professions
EU Representative, European Council of Engineers Chambers*

The war of aggression against Ukraine has forced millions of people to flee their homes. As well uncertainty about

what will happen next, language barriers and financial hardship, fleeing often also means being out of work. For many people, this means losing the feeling of being needed. Without work, people also lack important purpose in their lives and a daily routine.

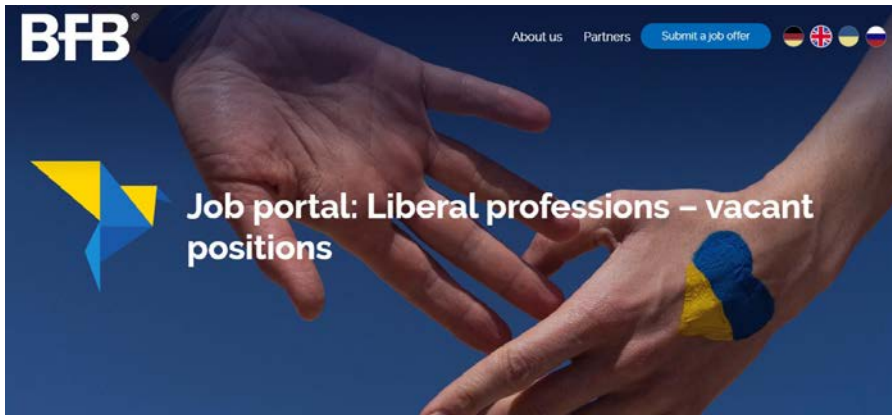
In Germany, 5.7 million people work in so-called **liberal professions**. Of these, around 1.7 million are freelancers and 4 million are employees. Due to the shortage of skilled workers, there are many **unfilled vacancies**.

Germany's Federal Association of Liberal Professions (**BFB**)¹ has set up a **portal**² to give **Ukrainian refugees job opportunities** in Germany. The website is available in German, English and Ukrainian, thereby actively overcoming potential language barriers. The association has thus created a low-threshold service to bring employers in the liberal professions into direct contact with potential employees. In this first year of the war, the portal has been accessed more than 700 000 times.

The liberal professions provide great **opportunities for integration**. This can also be seen, for example, from the proportion of trainees with foreign roots, which is now close to 16%. With its job portal, the BFB aims to

help as many Ukrainians as possible find work. The digital platform offers a wide range of opportunities, from internships and apprenticeships to permanent employment.

1. Bundesverband der Freien Berufe e. V. (BFB), <https://www.freie-berufe.de/verband/mitgliederorganisation/>
2. BFB, job portal, <https://freieberufe-jobportal.de/en/home>



© <https://freieberufe-jobportal.de/>

Building a secure future for ourselves and for Ukraine with renewable energy



Kęstutis KUPŠYS ©EESC

Kęstutis KUPŠYS (LT)
*Representative,
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Organisations*

The start of Russia's war against Ukraine is often – and unfortunately mistakenly – conceived as the starting point of the **spike in energy prices**. That is not the case: the energy price surge started **much earlier**¹ – in fact, as early as **August 2021**, when Gazprom drastically reduced its gas supply through the Yamal pipeline which had been functioning for decades without interruption.

Unfortunately, **we lost those six months**. The European Union did not come to its senses until February 24th of last year. The problem was already deep-rooted by then – the war simply highlighted the greatest vulnerabilities of EU countries and their dependence on an aggressive state.

And, of course, the energy price crisis exposed the issue of protecting the most vulnerable consumers. However,

as I have been working on the topic of energy poverty for several years, I can at least welcome the fact that the topic of **energy poverty has finally been acknowledged** and is being given due consideration in all EU countries.

We cannot help but acknowledge yet **another problem** – some countries, faced with the lack of climate-friendly energy resources, have turned a blind eye to the climate change crisis and gone **back to fossil fuels** (coal and fuel oil) and are developing **nuclear energy plans**. After the start-up of a nuclear power plant, which will take at least a decade, we will have wasted all this time and spent billions in investments on something that was supposed to solve the issue caused by a “bygone war” (from a future perspective ten years from now). Nuclear power will come hopelessly late, while the development of renewable energy sources (RES) makes it possible to **solve the problem here and now**, in a much shorter period of time.

Let me cite an example from our organisation's activities. To help con-

sumers buy RES power plants, we are organising a **collective purchase** made possible by EU funding from the **CLEAR-X**² project. Households are able and willing to pay for RES-derived electricity and want to become “prosumers”³ themselves. More of such initiatives, and not colossal decades-long projects, will bring us closer to **energy independence from aggressive neighbours**.

War is more localised but the climate crisis is global. The future Ukraine, which will have endured the war and regained its territorial integrity, will be a reliable partner of the European Union in solving the climate change issue.

1. POLITICO, Gas wars: How Putin sent EU energy prices rocketing, <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-energy-eu-prices-gas-vladimir-putin-ukraine-war-sanctions/>

2. Clear-X is a consortium of organisations across the EU, working together to provide consumers with reliable and affordable renewable technologies via collective purchase campaigns, <https://www.clear-x.eu/>

3. A prosumer is an individual who both consumes and produces.

A lesson called “war”

Justyna Kalina OCHĘDZAN (PL)

President, Greater Poland Coordinating Council – Union of Non-governmental Organisations

The first European war of the 21st century has been going on for a year already. How is it affecting us as Europeans? How is it changing our individual and collective consciousness? **What has this year of war taught me?**

On 5 March 2022, I began my personal Ukrainian-Russian war. For a month I managed **two sports halls** with 500 beds each which, according to the original plans of the regional anti-crisis centre, were supposed to be in operation for two days. There was nothing to suggest on that day that two halls at Poznań University of Technology would become **home – for one month – for over two and a half thousand people** displaced from Ukraine and that we, along with a group of NGOs, would be providing them the day-to-day conditions to live with dignity.

Before 5 March I didn't know how to **organise and plan 1500 meals in a**



Justyna K. Ochędzan (middle) with volunteers and local NGOs activists ©Justyna Kalina Ochędzan

day, without any funding, to feed mothers, children, senior citizens, people with disabilities and even animals that people had taken with them on this difficult journey. Never before had I had to organise – by myself – a **medical service**, isolation space for people with COVID-19, on-call doctors and psychologists with experience of working with people with war trauma. No one had prepared me for the real stories of war from people who had lost loved ones and their homes and how to answer the question “what will happen to us?” This year pushed me to the limits physically and mentally. I still don't know the best way to answer “what will happen to us?” but I know

that a genuine hug can replace any word.

Today, as a socially engaged politician, I am joining forces with NGOs, the Minister for Integration, local and regional authorities and academics to create a new dimension to **migration policy** in my country, based on the values of social assistance and the paradigm of social inclusion.

What has this year of war taught me? That a socially engaged politician must always be close to the people, so as not to get into the habit of talking about help without actually helping. That this war will permanently change my country and its people. That it is not the EU's euro, but American dollars that are bringing millions of people closer to the dream of a free Ukraine. That democracy is above all people, what connects them, and human decency, which must not be lost in times of crisis.

Instead of confrontation we urgently need cooperation



Juraj ŠIPKO (SK)

Director, Institute of Economic Research, Slovak Academy of Sciences

Juraj Šipko ©EESC

The end of the second decade and the beginning of the third decade of this century have been marked by a number of **systemic shocks**. These shocks have had and are continuing to have a very **negative impact on the real economy** in the European Union's Member States. The emergence and rapid spread of COVID-19, the Russian

invasion of Ukraine, and the upsurge in natural disasters on the old continent are having far-reaching consequences for the economies of EU countries. Of the three systemic shocks mentioned above, economic development in EU countries has been hardest hit by the conflict that has been ongoing in Ukraine for almost a year.

The **Russian invasion of Ukraine**, coupled with the imposition of sanctions, has led to huge **fragmentation in almost all areas**. There have been sharp rises in commodity prices, a decline in international trade and eco-

nomie growth, and supplier-customer relations and logistics have been disrupted. In addition, there has been a high degree of instability in commodity and financial markets, disruption in the international payment system, and a change in the structure of production and development, science and research. All of this has led to extremely **high levels of economic and political uncertainty** in the countries of the EU.

Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine has led to geopolitical and geo-economic blocs. The **international eco-**

conomic system, which began to be built at the end of the Second World War on the basis of mutually accepted and agreed rules, is currently **under threat** at its core. The current geopolitical crisis has led to an energy crisis, a food crisis, an increase in poverty and deepening inequality, and a huge increase in public debt and high inflation rates in certain EU countries.

The question is what should be done?

The answer to this question is similar to that given in the uncertain period at the end of the Second World War. Politicians and economic experts at that time agreed on a post-war world order and created mutually accepted rules on the path towards building stability and prosperity for the benefit of all of the people on the planet.

That is why the biggest challenge now for all those involved in the administration and management of international and bilateral political and economic relations is to embark on a path of **mutual respect, responsibility and mutually beneficial cooperation**, rather than a senseless confrontation that should have no place in the 21st century.

A year into a war that has scarred Europe



Ioannis Vardakastanis ©EESC

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL)
Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group

President, Greek National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP)
President, European Disability Forum (EDF)

President, International Disability Alliance (IDA)

Member, Economic and Social Council of Greece (OKE)

Member, Greek National Commission of Human Rights (EEDA)

On 24 February 2022, Europe was thrust from one crisis into another of an entirely different nature. While the world was still emerging from the depths of a pandemic that had cost countless lives and ravaged the global economy, Russia invaded Ukraine and the face of Europe was again altered forever.

In the midst of a war that threatens to permanently scar our continent, we have nevertheless borne witness to the strength of human compassion and solidarity. **Civil society organisations** have been a huge part of this,

particularly with regard to **evacuating and rehousing Ukrainians**. Their help was particularly valuable when it came to finding safety for marginalised groups, such as persons with disabilities, who are often the first to be left behind.

Beyond this, civil society has also been at the forefront of **mitigating the war's effects** on the rest of Europe. The war, combined with the aftermath of the pandemic, has created a perfect storm of spiralling fuel costs, food scarcity, uncontrollable inflation and, as a result, a devastating cost-of-living crisis. **Increasing numbers of people in the EU are reliant on support.** Where governments have been unable to offer this, civil society organisations have stepped in.

A year on and there still appears to be no end in sight. Ukrainians who have fled their country are having to come to terms with the fact that they will have to endure their current circumstances for some time yet. For the rest of Europe, as it becomes increasingly difficult to make ends meet, **the value of civil society is being made even clearer.** We can only hope that policy makers take heed of how essential civil society has been in weathering this storm and offer them adequate support and protection going forward.



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WHAT IS EESC OPINION ECO/596 ALL ABOUT?

An interview with Elena Calistru, rapporteur for EESC opinion ECO/596 on FAST-CARE¹, the “Flexible Assistance to Territories (FAST)” package

Elena-Alexandra CALISTRU (RO)
President, Funky Citizens

The opinion was presented and adopted at the September plenary session in 2022.

What are the three main findings of this opinion?

As a response to the ongoing attack by Russia against Ukraine, the European Commission has passed a new comprehensive package to extend the support already provided under [CARE– Cohesion’s Action for Refugees in Europe](#)², providing further support and further flexibility within cohesion policy funding.

More flexibility to rules for funding was added, as well as additional funding for the medium-term challenges related to the issue of Ukrainians refugees fleeing the war.

The effects of Russia’s military aggression created additional challenges and delayed the implementation of projects due to the combined effects of COVID-19, high energy costs and a shortage of raw materials, and urgent action was needed.

How could these issues be addressed? What are the three main recommendations or proposals of the opinion?

Civil society has had a strong role to play in the first response and will continue to be a heavy lifter in the response to new migratory challenges

and, together with local authorities, will be able to access some resources through [FAST-CARE](#)³. This is a welcome solution and more should be done in this direction.

The Commission has to work with Member States, local authorities and civil society to eliminate all possible unnecessary administrative burdens to funding, while offering full transparency with regard to the allocation of funds and the execution of measures to tackle the consequences of the war in Ukraine.



Elena-Alexandra Calistru © EESC

Full flexibility to funding rules and swift reactions to political developments will be needed on a continuing basis, a recommendation which the EESC has always put forward and which is reflected in this package.

The situation is evolving quickly, do you have any additional demands and/or proposals which are not mentioned in the opinion?

Indeed, the Russian aggression continues and with dire effects that will also mean that more resources need

to be allocated to mitigate its effects. A thorough reflection on whether the same measures should be taken into account for the new multi-annual financial framework will need to take place.

Cohesion policy cannot be a silver bullet and as the crises continue to accumulate, we will need to evaluate the need for a special fund dedicated to answering these effects.

After the adoption of this opinion, what have you done/will you do to promote it?

I have started to promote the package among civil society organisations and local authorities that should now have access to at least 30% of the funding available. I have been partly to discussions with the European Commission within the [Common Provisions Regulation](#)⁴ framework. I have reached out to Members of the European Parliament in the EP Committee on Regional Development.

Read the EESC opinion on FAST-CARE at: <https://europa.eu/lyBVDmV>

1. EESC opinion ECO/596,

<https://europa.eu/lyBVDmV>

2. European Commission, CARE,

<https://europa.eu/!tRrd6>

3. European commission, FAST-CARE,

<https://europa.eu/!rDVnDh>

4. European Commission, Common Provisions Regulation, <https://europa.eu/!DPJPbY>

COMMENT ON CURRENT AFFAIRS

The end of globalisation.

A comment on the World Economic Forum's annual meeting held in Davos, 16-20 January 2023

Jan DIRX (NL)

Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group

Liaison Officer, Groene11 (Green11), Dutch nature and environmental organisations

Over the course of 2022, the signals became increasingly clear, first as a question, but as time went on an exclamation mark emerged more clearly: the **end of globalisation** is in sight. Last month in Davos, at the 53rd [World Economic Forum](#)¹, there was a sense that those days were over. Or as [Le Monde](#)² wrote: "At Davos, the end of globalisation is on everyone's mind".

Of course, many heads of government, industrialists and bankers from all over the world still came to the small Swiss town. And of course, the Russians have not been welcome for a year now, but it was telling that both Xi Jinping and Joe Biden sent representatives and no longer wanted to address the Forum itself.



Jan Dirx © EESC

The causes of this development are the **growing geopolitical tensions** and the realisation of how **vulnerable global supply lines** actually are. This is leading countries to protect and strengthen their own industries, including with large amounts of subsidies. The most prominent example is the [Inflation Reduction Act](#)³ (IRA), the massive USD 370 billion subsidy package through which President Biden aims to promote the production of domestic clean technologies.

In response, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, launched a plan in Davos to bolster Eu-

rope's clean tech industry through new [European investment funds](#)⁴. And it is well known that China always heavily subsidises its own industry. But what about poor countries that cannot provide such funding streams? They remain in the cold, as representatives of those countries rightly pointed out.

In short, it is clear that we are living in a time of transition, where our economies **must become circular** not only from an environmental point of view, but also from a geopolitical perspective.

1. World Economic Forum, Davos, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2023>

2. LE MONDE, At Davos, the end of globalization is on everyone's mind, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2023/01/17/at-davos-the-end-of-globalization-is-on-everyone-s-mind_6011910_19.html

3. White House, Inflation Reduction Act 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/15/by-the-numbers-the-inflation-reduction-act/>

4. European Union, The Green Deal Industrial Plan, <https://europa.eu/!cQFGpR>

UN 2030 Agenda – mid-term.

A comment on the mid-term assessment of the progress of the Sustainable Development Agenda

Lutz RIBBE (DE)

Director, Department for Nature Conservation Policy, EuroNatur

It has almost become a ritual: the international community of the United Nations sets out future goals, and euphoric statements from politicians come thick and fast in response. The same happened in **2015**, when the [UN 2030 Agenda](#)¹ was adopted, with its [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#)². A better, fairer, more sustainable world was promised for 2030: a world



Lutz Ribbe © EESC

without hunger or poverty, and with good quality education, clean energy, sustainable consumption and production and, of course, peace, as well as gender equality.

The [mid-term review](#)³ is now under way, and the picture looks far less euphoric. Some say there is "still a long way to go"; others speak of a "standstill". A more **detailed analysis does not reveal any positive signs**. Critics already fear that the UN 2030 Agenda will go the same way as the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#)⁴, in which world leaders promised in 1992 to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that prevented dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. But the rising

number of storms, droughts, floods, melting glaciers and record temperatures show quite the opposite!

Today, almost 1 billion people go hungry, and that is not primarily due to the war in Ukraine. Global biodiversity is continuing to decline at breathtaking speed and the gap between rich and poor is widening steadily.

Europe always prides itself on being a pioneer, but are its own policies really

being analysed with a critical enough eye? Do we really know whether the [Green Deal](#)⁵ or the [Common Agricultural Policy](#)⁶ will, for example, help bring an end to hunger, or whether hunger might not even be exacerbated? Much more thought is needed, and in our opinions we at the EESC should also look more closely at whether our proposals will really bring about greater sustainability in the world at a fast enough pace.

1. United Nations 2030 Agenda, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
2. United Nations, 17 Sustainable Development Goals, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
3. UN SDSN, Europe Sustainable Development Report 2022, <https://eu-dashboards.sdgindex.org/chapters/executive-summary>
4. UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>
5. European Commission, European Green Deal, <https://europa.eu/18bB4bR>
6. European Commission, Common Agricultural Policy, <https://europa.eu/1xcCxFN>

NEWS FROM THE GROUP

Mid-term elections: Vice-Presidency of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group



S. Holst, R. Kolbe, I. Izverniceanu de la Iglesia, J. Dirx, K. Balon, L. Pavić-Rogošić, P. Barbieri (From top left to right) © EESC

During its meeting on 24 January 2023, the Civil Society Organisations' Group elected its vice-presidency for the second half of the 2020-2025 term:

- **Krzysztof Balon (PL)**, Secretary of the Programming Committee of the Working Community, Associations of Social Organisations (WRZOS)
- **Pietro Barbieri (IT)**, Former Spokesperson, Third Sector Forum and President, Centre for Autonomy
- **Jan Dirx (NL)**, Liaison Officer, Groene11 (Green11), Dutch nature and environmental organisations
- **Sif Holst (DK)**, Vice-Chair, Disabled People's Organisations Denmark
- **Ileana Izverniceanu de la Iglesia (ES)**, Director for Communication and Institutional Relations and Spokesperson, Organisation of Consumers and Users (OCU)
- **Rudolf Kolbe (AT)**, President, Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions and Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineers
- **Lidija Pavić-Rogošić (HR)**, Director, civil society organisation "Sustainable Community Development" (ODRAZ)

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

SDGs' progress at a stagnation in Europe and declining in the rest of the world, warns the Sustainable Development Network

On 24 January, at the first plenary session of the year, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held a debate on the "Mid-term assessment of the progress towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda", with **Guillaume Lafortune**, Vice-President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UN SDSN)¹.



Guillaume Lafortune © EESC

Mr Lafortune said that the [2022 Europe Sustainable Development Report](#)², written with the support and collaboration of the EESC, confirmed that the world is significantly off-track in achieving most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³, and multiple crises have led to a reversal of SDG progress. However, the EU would have the opportunity to take the lead in implementing the so-called [2030 Agenda](#)⁴.

Five Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group contributed to the debate. The first to speak was **Lutz Ribbe**, who drew attention to war and hunger, as there are one billion suffering from it in the world, and to the little environmental progress exposed at [COP 27](#)⁵, underlining that decision-makers need to look at whether they are taking the right approach when it comes to the various crises that societies are facing.



Lidija Pavić-Rogošić © EESC

Lidija Pavić-Rogošić pointed out that the transformation towards sustainability will only be successful if it is based on broad support and the active participation of all parts of society, and that the EU needs a comprehensive strategy on the SDGs with the aim of improving coherence and synergy between all policy areas.



Arnaud Schwartz © EESC

Arnaud Schwartz, who is chairing the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO)⁶ at present, stressed that the EU generates significant spill over effects on the rest of the world, around 40%, notably through unsustainable supply chains, and that this must be seriously addressed in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Sif Holst recalled that the promise of leaving no one behind seems to have been forgotten from the perspective of disabled and marginalised groups.

Despite this, there is still hope, as civil society organisations are engaging, learning, adapting and trying their best to include those at risk of being left behind. This would be key to achieving the SDGs.



Sif Holst © EESC

Finally, **Zsolt Kükedi** asked Mr Lafortune whether the EU should increase the budget of 20 billion per year allocated to climate action, and for better ways to help restore biodiversity.

"By living up to the ambitions of the [European Green Deal](#)⁷ at home and strengthening access to international SDG financing, the EU can achieve its strategic objectives and rally other countries to its values centred around human dignity, freedom, and the rule of law. The EU needs to push for this agenda within the UN system, to make sure we won't look back to the SDGs as a failure in the future," concluded **Mr Lafortune**.

1. UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, <https://www.unsdsn.org/>

2. UN SDSN, Europe Sustainable Development Report 2022, <https://eu-dashboards.sdgindex.org/chapters/executive-summary>

3. United Nations, 17 Sustainable Development Goals, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

4. United Nations 2030 Agenda, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

5. COP 27, <https://cop27.org/#/>

6. EESC, Sustainable Development Observatory, <https://europa.eu/!Ht88Vb>

7. European Commission, European Green Deal, <https://europa.eu/!8bB4bR>

EESC Members calls for a Single Market that leaves nobody behind

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the [Single Market](#)¹, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held a debate about the future of the world's largest trading bloc, with **Commission Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager**, during its January plenary session.



Margrethe Vestager © EESC

Participants widely considered the Single Market the EU's greatest achievement, but also pointed to its limitations in the face of current crises and the increased state aid in response to these. In concrete, the Committee suggests that the Single Market should be able to provide reciprocity in trade standards. The EU must promote research, strengthen circular and digital skills and ensure fair prices that include higher input costs and costs for increased sustainability. The EU also needs to make sure that it effectively enforces existing legislation and holds a permanent, constructive, social and civic dialogue on all issues.

Ms Vestager acknowledged that the EU needs to continue its work on the Single Market. The Commission is currently reviewing its rules and guidelines for competition policy. The Executive Vice-President said that "the combination of country subsidies with high energy prices is a great threat for European competitiveness on a global scale".

Several Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group participated in

the debate. President **Séamus Boland** affirmed that the Single Market needed improvement. It needed to deal with the recent shocks – Brexit, the Ukraine war and the COVID-19 pandemic – which would be crucial for achieving Commission President von der Leyen's goal of leaving nobody behind.



Séamus Boland © EESC

Giuseppe Guerini, spokesperson of the [EESC's Social Economy Category](#)², stressed that the revision of the rules on competition and state aid, which was under way, needed to ensure support for businesses, while avoiding to favour just States that can effort State intervention. New rules should not be to the detriment of social enterprises carrying out important services in the social, educational and health care sectors.

According to **Kęstutis Kupšys**, the Single Market would only be fully accomplished when it is able to ensure fair and equal treatment to all European consumers. He mentioned the [Dieselgate scandal](#)³ as a negative example: "230 000 German consumers got compensation of 750 million euros back in 2020, other European consumers got nothing".

"Our Single Market is a tool to work towards European integration," reminded [EESC INT Section](#)⁴ president **Alain Coheur** and said: "The Single Market has huge potential when



Alain Coheur © EESC

it comes to creating a more social Europe, and we need to seize its opportunity to strengthen and defend our EU values and fundamental rights."

Finally, **Ileana Izverniceanu de la Iglesia** considered strengthening the Single Market vital for ensuring a coordinated digital and green transition for all citizens that leaves nobody behind. She called for ensuring product safety, strict environmental and labour laws, affordable access to basic goods for households and legal certainty for consumers.



Ileana Izverniceanu de la Iglesia © EESC

1. European Commission, European Single Market, <https://europa.eu/!MGcmv>

2. EESC, Social Economy Category, <https://europa.eu/!ht47UK>

3. European Commission, Dieselgate scandal, <https://europa.eu/!VxxNdX>

4. EESC, Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT) <https://europa.eu/!pK46ky>

President Roberta Metsola on the EU's challenges in 2023

On 25 January 2023, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) welcomed **Roberta Metsola**, President of the European Parliament, to debate the *European Union's responses to (geo-) political challenges in 2023*.



Roberta Metsola and Christa Schweng © EESC

The exchange of views confirmed that both the EESC and the European Parliament (EP) want to strengthen their cooperation in order to jointly address the multitude of challenges that the European house is currently facing, and to make the European Union fit for the future. The presidents of both institutions agreed that competitiveness, together with more strategic autonomy, is crucial in current times.

According to **Ms Metsola**, the EESC and the EP have to continue giving a common, effective response to the challenges induced by the pandemic, and those engendered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The two institutions also have to work on short, medium and long-term reforms, and on the consolidation of the European Union's accountability and legitimacy.

Two Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group took the stage. Group President **Séamus Boland** urged the EU to prepare and manage the implications of a long-term war between Russia and Ukraine, and asked the President of the European Parliament to listen to civil society organisations in order to address the lack of (digital) skills. He said: "In the [European Year of Skills](#)¹, we need to ensure that those who fall out of the education system are brought back in. Youth organisations, including informal ones, put forward many solutions to ensure that young people acquire the necessary skills."

Then, **Christian Moos** claimed that the European Union was in need of more strategic thinking, less short-term interests and more defence capability. Focusing on the latter, he emphasised the necessity to send more armaments to Ukraine and to make long-needed improvements to the equipment of the armed forces in many EU Member States. While he called for a strong EU defence pillar and for consolidating existing military alliances, he stressed that EU politics should not be militarised, but common values such as human dignity, unalienable fundamental rights and the rule of law be upheld.



Christian Moos © EESC

1. European Commission, European Year of Skills 2023, <https://europa.eu/WFC99c>

The Swedish Presidency in the focus

The last debate of the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) plenary session in January focused on the *Priorities of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union*. It took place in the presence of **Jessika Roswall**, the Swedish Minister for EU Affairs.

The participants discussed and welcomed the [four priorities of the Swedish Presidency](#)¹ - namely security, competitiveness, green and energy transition, democratic values and the rule of law. Minister **Jessika Roswall** stressed that her country had taken over the presidency at a time of historic challenges and that "Rus-



Jessika Roswall and Christa Schweng © EESC

sia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine will continue to dominate the European agenda." She said that the presidency considered open dialogue and close cooperation with all the other European institutions and bodies, including the EESC, paramount for accomplishing its priorities. The Swed-

ish Presidency would aim to do the utmost to maintain and consolidate European unity – a mission that, in light of the multiple crises the European Union is currently facing, has never been so urgent.

Several Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group took part in the debate. President **Séamus Boland** highlighted the need to carry out an effective legislative management of the Union in these times of crises, stressing the importance of addressing the energy crisis, whilst maintaining climate goals, striving for poverty reduction and maintaining high standards of civil dialogue.

He also asked the Minister how the Swedish Presidency would promote the social aspects of sustainable development and implement the [recommendations of the Conference on the Future of Europe](#)².



Baiba Miltoviča © EESC

Baiba Miltoviča, president of the [EESC's TEN Section](#)³, committed to deliver a high-quality exploratory opinion ([TEN/794](#))⁴ on "Wooden construction for CO2 reduction in the building sector".



Jan Torsten Andersson © EESC

Jan Torsten Andersson said that the Swedish Presidency had missed a very important priority: the fight against poverty in the EU. Boosting the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#)⁵ would be essential to ensure the proper functioning of the Single Market.

Elena-Alexandra Calistru pointed out that the European Union would need to exploit these times of change and challenges, so as to accelerate, and ultimately complete its process of integration.

Andris Gobiņš stressed that the EU institutions, together with civil society organisations, needed to strengthen democracy, freedoms and rule of law in the EU, especially to fight against the numerous external forces constantly trying to undermine and interfere at EU level.

Finally, **Louise Grabo** urged the Minister to ensure that the Swedish Presidency involves young people in the public debate and in the policy making processes.

1. Swedish Presidency, priorities, <https://europa.eu/itvmGxN>

2. European Commission, Conference on the Future of Europe, final report, <https://europa.eu/ICNwFyK>

3. EESC, Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN), <https://europa.eu/!kn94kX>

4. EESC opinion TEN/794, <https://europa.eu/!TBmjmi>

5. European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, <https://europa.eu/!wqXFct>

OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 24 and 25 January 2023. The EESC plenary adopted 16 opinions. 5 opinions were drafted by Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY), rapporteur, [CCMI/191](#)¹ Sustainable recycling, use of secondary raw materials and Just Transition in the European ferrous and nonferrous metal industry

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY), rapporteur, [CCMI/192](#)² Addressing structural shortages and strengthening strategic autonomy in the semiconductor ecosystem

Arnaud Schwartz (FR), rapporteur, [NAT/875](#)³ Labelling of organic pet food

Christian MOOS (DE), rapporteur, [REX/562](#)⁴ The EU Strategic Compass

Kinga Joó (HU), rapporteur, [SOC/741](#)⁵ The European Care strategy

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's [website](#)⁶.

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on 22 and 23 March 2023. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#)⁷.

A list including all **new work appointments** of Civil Society Organisations' Group Members is available on the Committee's [website](#)⁸.

1. EESC opinion CCMI/191, <https://europa.eu/!vwwtOJ>

2. EESC opinion CCMI/192, <https://europa.eu/!xCwvGF>

3. EESC opinion NAT/875, <https://europa.eu/!YBCJGD>

4. EESC opinion REX/562, <https://europa.eu/!INXB4dy>

5. EESC opinion SOC/741, <https://europa.eu/!6hTRYc>

6. EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/!wF86wY>

7. EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/!Dg84qG>

8. EESC, New work appointments, <https://europa.eu/!89GcYh>

UPCOMING EVENTS

01/03/2023 – Meeting of the EESC's Social Economy Category

02/03/2023 – Meeting of the EESC's Farmers' Category

17/03/2023 – Meeting of the EESC's Liberal Professions' Category

01-03/03/2023 – Civil Society Days 2023

22/03/2023 – Thematic debate on 'The fight against poverty and the role of CSOs in combatting poverty'



22 March 2023
11:30 CEST
WEBSTREAMING

The fight against poverty and the role of civil society organisations in combatting poverty

Thematic debate with:

Marina Elvira CALDERONE, Minister for Labour and Social Policy, Italy

Marie TOUSSAINT, Member of the European Parliament

Carlos SUSIAS, President of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)

Christophe ROBERT, Executive Officer of the French foundation Abbé Pierre



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The debate will be webstreamed: <https://europa.eu/!g8kJtC>

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