



European Economic
and Social Committee

April
2023

Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin



OUR TEAM TERM 2023-2025

FOREWORD

Democracy: A Fragile Flower.

Séamus BOLAND (IE)

President, Civil Society Organisations' Group



Séamus Boland © EESC

The themes of our two events last month revolved around the importance of civil society organisations in fighting against all aspects of poverty and at the same time strengthening our democracies. In terms of poverty, there was a stark reminder that in the EU in 2021, there were still 95.4 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, an equivalent to 21.7 % of the EU population. Some 24.4 % of children were affected and in the plus 65 age bracket the figure was 19.6 %.¹

We also learned that people in vulnerable regions around the world, particularly in Africa, are still dealing with the extreme causes of poverty, meaning that millions of families are exposed to hunger. While in the EU this type of poverty is rare, mainly because of having better social care infrastructure, it is still unacceptable that so many people are denied access to a variety of services of general interest.

One of the factors contributing to poverty is weak democratic institutions. Again, in the EU we can claim that we are fortunate, that we continually aspire to having free and fair democratic systems in place. However, it is worrying that according to **Ken Godfrey**, Executive Director of the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), who spoke at the EESC's March plenary session, at least 10 EU Member States are witnessing authoritarian shifts that threaten fundamental rights. Some may argue that the criteria of the Democracy Index 2022² are unfair. However, any weakness within the EU must be viewed with huge concern.

One of the tests of EU democracies is the extent to which civil society organisations are supported, in terms of having the

freedom to speak and bear witness to system failures in their countries. Some civil society organisations are fortunate to have strong independent sources of finance. Many are working on behalf of minorities and communities whose voice is unheard. By definition, all civil society organisations require financial support and recognition from their respective governments. When that is not forthcoming, then serious questions need to be asked. Failure to provide a platform for the voiceless, ethnic groups and others, is in effect a failure of true democracy and can eventually lead to needless division within communities, with the potential consequences of violent disputes.

It was this failure in Northern Ireland that led to over thirty years of violence, resulting in over 3,000 deaths and many thousands living with life altering injuries. This month, we are celebrating 25 years since the Northern Ireland Peace agreement³ (Good Friday Agreement) was concluded. It is useful to note that this agreement specifically developed a democratic model, which allows both communities to live and work in an atmosphere of peace.

In 2023 and during the 2023-2025 term of office, the eradication of poverty will continue to be the overriding priority of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. Our work⁴ will also continue to address the role of CSOs in defending and strengthening European democracy, including the fight against disinformation and the shrinking/shifting civic space.

Séamus Boland

1. Eurostat, Living conditions in Europe, <https://europa.eu/gjj/MnT>

2. EIU, Democracy Index 2022, https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/?utm_source=eiw-website&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=democracy-index-2022

3. United Nations, Northern Ireland Peace Agreement, <https://peacemaker.un.org/uk-ireland-good-friday98>

4. EESC 2023 Work Programme of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, <https://europa.eu/!DWXjg8>

THIS ISSUE

Our team for the 2023-2025 term p. 3

Reflections p. 9

News from the Group p. 10

Highlights from the last plenary session p. 13

Overview of recent work p. 16

Upcoming events p. 16

OUR TEAM FOR THE 2023-2025 TERM

Our Vice-Presidents

Serving the Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group.



Krzysztof Stanisław Balon
© EESC

**Krzysztof Stanisław
BALON (PL)**

*President,
Programming
Council of
the Working
Community of
Associations of*

Social Organisations (WRZOS)

I would like to express my deep gratitude for being elected vice-president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). It is a **great honour**; but first and foremost, it is an **obligation** and a **responsibility**, namely for strengthening our Group in shaping a sustainable, a just and a true civil society.

I am convinced that **my experience** in the service of the Group since 2010, which was always focused on social justice, development of civil society organisations (CSOs) and the social economy, as well as on social cohesion, and holding senior positions (Vice-president of the Group 2018-2020, EESC Bureau Member,

Category spokesperson, Section vice-president and Permanent Group president) will help me in fulfilling this obligation and in assuming this responsibility. My vast experience in leading functions in CSOs in two Member States outside of the Brussels bubble will also be useful, as will my Masters of Science in Social Management, management and multi-cultural communication skills, and fluency in English and German.

The work of a Group vice-president involves **teamwork**;

led by the Group President, together with the vice-president's colleagues. It is certainly about further improving the **working conditions of Members**, for instance giving them better information about the "New works", meaning upcoming study groups for EESC opinions, delegations, etc., before applying. Furthermore, we should step up the organisation of "on the spot" **meetings in the Member**

States, including in the framework of individual "outreach" activities. Finally, the five **Categories** managed by the Group secretariat, which reflect civil society, could contribute to lifting civil dialogue in the EU to the same level as social dialogue.



© Darya Lavinskaya, Shutterstock

Last but not least, since there will be no free Europe without free Ukraine, as Civil Society Organisations' Group, and representatives of our civil society organisations, we should significantly boost our **support for Ukrainian civil society**. Together with the Group Members, I will look for the most effective measures to fulfil this goal.

From urban planning to societal planning: a lifelong struggle for equality and rights



Pietro Vittorio Barbieri © EESC

**Pietro Vittorio
BARBIERI (IT)**

*Former
Spokesperson,
Forum Terzo
Settore (Third
Sector Forum)*

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

I was 20 years old when a dive into the sea gave me a spinal cord injury and resulting disability, putting a stop to

my dream of being a town planner. It was 1987 and architectural drawing was still being done by hand. I changed tack and enrolled in the faculty of humanities, but a **passion for politics** took over: the student movement and the cause of persons with disabilities. The level of discrimination was such that **I focused primarily on the issue of disabilities**. It deeply affected me. My focus has never been restricted to just a few forms of discrimination.

Minorities in general have been the subject of my personal studies, progressing to the focal point of **human rights**.

I worked for the **development of Italian, European and international legislation**, becoming versed in the jargon and learning to speak this new language. The pinnacle of this work was taking on the role of advisor to the Italian Government delegation to the United Nations ad hoc committee

for developing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD¹).

The **rule-of-law approach** was therefore my first port of call. The democratic model I was looking at required in-depth consideration of the subject of the economic paradigm. Criticism of the capital-labour ratio was the **first focus** of my studies. The contrast between

the existing theories and individual freedoms inevitably arose. Research has thus been a **second focus** in my life in the non-profit, solidarity-based, mutual and democratic forms of business model. In Italy, the “third sector” is defined as types of activity in which individuals choose to earn less to ensure substantive equality between colleagues, with a strong focus on working for people’s rights, environmental sustainability

and culture and knowledge for all. I was then chosen to lead the Italian platform, the [Third Sector Forum](#)².

Clearly, **my priorities as a vice-president** of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group are directed towards all forms of exclusion and poverty, the rule of law and respect for minorities, and of course towards participatory models of the economy, public policies and society.

A pensioner, but young at heart



Jan Dirx © EESC

Jan DIRX (NL)
*Liaison Officer,
Groene11
(Green11), Dutch
nature and
environmental
organisations*

First let me tell you a bit about **my background**. I studied chemistry and philosophy of science at two universities in the Netherlands. I worked at a university and in the scientific office of the Green Party, and was an elected representative at local and provincial levels. After my time in politics, I worked for a series of nature and environmental organisations. Officially I am retired, but I’m still connected as a volunteer to the main organisation I used to work for. At the Committee, I represent Dutch nature and environmental organisations, which work in a partnership that I set up ([Groene11](#)³) aimed at advocacy at national and European level. These

organisations together have almost two million members and donors.

I am a good listener and have a good sense of where crucial (political) disagreements lie. I am often able to **find compromises and mediate**. I also have a long track record as a **strategic and public affairs** adviser.

My motivation to keep putting my heart and soul into this work after retirement comes from my belief that **we should leave our children and grandchildren a better world** than the one we inherited from our parents and grandparents. For me, a better world is built on **three pillars**: the first is economic, social and financial fairness, the second is environmental sustainability and the third is democratic rule of law with guaranteed

human rights. I am convinced that the European Union has an indispensable and essential role to play here and that civil society organisations do too. This is why I attach such



© Arkom Suvarnasiri, Shutterstock

importance to the EESC and want to contribute all my knowledge, skills and experience to help our Committee to work effectively. **My priorities** are environmental sustainability and the protection of the democratic rule of law and human rights.

If we do things right, we can turn inequality into equality



Sif Holst © EESC

Sif HOLST (DK)
*Vice-Chair,
Disabled People's
Organisations
Denmark*

I believe that with the right tools, with the right angle, we can **protect and engage the most vulnerable groups** in our society, creating change

for the better. And I believe that civil society is vital to achieve this change.

I have been involved in civil society organisations for **more than 30 years**: scouts, youth organisations (including serving on the Danish Youth Council), international exchange programmes and now disability organisations, and the Danish Women’s Council and the Danish Outdoor Council.

During my term as vice-president of the Committee’s Ad Hoc Group on Equality, I have tried to identify the barriers that might keep any Member from being able to do their job, whether due to gender-related

1. CRPD, <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>

2. Third Sector Forum, <https://www.forumterzosettore.it/>

3. Groene11, <https://www.groene11.nl/>

barriers, a disability (which might be invisible to others), age, where we live, our religion or other things. I believe our Group could also benefit from increased focus on **securing optimal working conditions** for us as Members.

I would also like to contribute with my **skills as communicator and**

advocate, continuing the process of making our Group, and the EESC as a whole, ever more visible and our work even more meaningful.

I have been a Member of the EESC since 2020, after serving as an alternate since 2013. **My roles** include vice-chair of [Disabled People's Organisations Denmark](#)¹, chair of

the Danish Accessibility Scheme [God Adgang](#)², chair of the [Danish Knowledge Centre on Disability](#)³, board member of the [Danish Institute for Human Rights](#)⁴, member of the [Danish Health Technology Council](#)⁵ and chair of the Danish Disability Fund for development work in the Global South.

Together we are stronger



Ileana Izverniceanu de la Iglesia © EESC

Ileana IZVERNICEANU DE LA IGLESIA (ES)
Director for Communication and Institutional Relations and Spokesperson,

Organisation of Consumers and Users (OCU)

My aim is to put my **experience in defending and safeguarding citizens' consumer rights** at the service of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group. I have been working in this field for **over 25 years** in the Organisation of Consumers and Users (OCU⁶), one of the most comprehensively representative consumer associations in my country. My organisation is part of an international group - [Euroconsumers](#)⁷ - which is made up of the most comprehensively representative consumer organisations in Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Brazil. In addition, since 1978 the OCU has been part of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC⁸), of whose Executive I have the

honour to be a member.

This body enables civil society organisations to express their views at European level and thus helps to strengthen the democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of the EU.

Consumption, interpreted as access to goods and services, is part of the daily life of ALL citizens of the European Union, and defending and protecting their rights and interests is an objective shared by all EU institutions. To this end, I believe it is important that the **views of citizens as consumers** are taken into account in the organisation of the Civil Society Organisations' Group as it seeks to represent civil society.

The Group should represent the breadth and diversity of civil society organisations in order to achieve the objective of reflecting citizens' views. Citizens in their role as consumers are a foundation stone of the European

Union, which was initially conceived as a market. In this connection there are **many problems facing consumers** today: digital markets, ensuring security (both legal certainty and food security), equal and fair access to goods and services. Protecting vulnerable consumers must be one of the priorities of our Group.

For all these reasons, I am looking forward to putting my experience and the support of my organisation at both national and European level at the



© Rawpixel.com, Shutterstock

service of the Group, and to fulfilling the role entrusted to me, which is simply to defend consumers' interests.

Putting all my expertise at the service of the Group's priorities



Rudolf Kolbe © EESC

Rudolf KOLBE (AT)
President, Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions
President,

Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineers

President of Honour, European Council of the Liberal Professions (CEPLIS)

Our society is currently facing **many difficult challenges**. It is and has always been important to me to make the best possible use of my knowledge and experience, but also my humour and optimism, to meet these challenges successfully. Many of the most pressing issues in society are closely linked to areas that are important to me personally due to my decades of professional experience

1. Disabled People's Organisations Denmark, <https://handicap.dk/>
2. God Adgang, <https://godadgang.dk/>
3. Danish Knowledge Centre on Disability, <https://videnomhandicap.dk/>
4. Danish Institute for Human Rights, <https://www.humanrights.dk/>
5. Danish Health Technology Council, <https://behandlingsraadet.dk/>
6. Organisations of Consumers and Users, <https://www.ocu.org/>
7. Euroconsumers, <https://www.euroconsumers.org/>
8. BEUC, <https://www.beuc.eu/>

and of championing the interests of those I represent.

With my **professional background** as a freelance surveyor, I am a small business owner and thus part of an important economic group that provides over 50% of economic added value in the EU. **For over two decades I have represented the interests of the so-called liberal professions** at national and EU level on a voluntary basis. I am therefore aware of the great potential of SMEs and the liberal professions to meet civil society's – and therefore the Civil Society Organisations'

Group's – most important objectives. **Eradicating poverty** in all its forms is **closely linked to the daily work of the liberal professions** and ranges from ensuring sustainable and affordable housing and living conditions (architects and engineers, etc.) and resilient European health and welfare systems, including educational, economic and other support measures (doctors, pharmacists, social workers, lawyers, tax advisors, etc.), to all aspects of managing a fair and social green and digital transition, such as access to basic digital services, to necessary training and retraining, to support and much more.

My role is therefore also to share information and expertise, making use of my excellent links to many different civil society organisations (CSOs), which play a key role in addressing and solving many pressing issues related to poverty and its various challenges.

Decentralised CSOs and volunteers will also play an increasingly important role in finding appropriate local solutions to global challenges in the future. I therefore think it is essential, not just for me but for all of us, to **further develop and step up contact** with the public and with CSOs.

Together for a stronger European civil society



Lidija Pavić-Rogošić © EESC

**Lidija
PAVIĆ-ROGOŠIĆ (HR)**
*Director, Croatian
civil society
organisation
"Sustainable
Community
Development" (ODRAZ)*

I have been a Member of the EESC since July 2013. I am active in the field of **sustainable/urban-rural development and mobility issues** and in the area of external relations, including the Western Balkans, EuroMed and Chile.

I am an architect by **profession**, with a post-graduate degree in Practice of Social Change from the Social Policy Department at London Metropolitan University.

I am the director of [ODRAZ-Sustainable Community Development](https://www.odraz.hr/?lang=en)¹, which is a Croatian civil society organisation established in 2000. Before that, I worked at the Croatian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning and at international organisations dealing with environmental protection and civil society development.

For many years I have been active in various civil society organisations:

I am one of the founders of the Croatian Rural Development Network ([HMRR](https://hmrr.hr/en/home/)²) and of sustainable urban mobility network [CIVINET Slovenia-Croatia-SEE](https://civinet.hr/)³, a member of the Supervisory Council of the [Croatian Volunteer Development Centre](https://www.hcrv.hr/english)⁴ and of the Soroptimist International Club Zagreb Centre, and a Board member of [Europe's People's Forum](https://europepeoplesforum.eu/)⁵.

My **education and work experience** in the civil and public sector and in international organisations is a good basis for supporting the president and the work of the Civil Society Organisations' Group in the areas in which

I have expertise, which are in line with the Group's work programme: focusing on poverty and inequalities, enhancing the voice of civil society and strengthening internal and external cooperation.

Moreover, I know how the EESC works, having experience as a Member of the EESC, the Group Bureau and the REX⁶ Bureau. I have a record of being a rapporteur, a co-rapporteur and a study group president. As a Member of three Sections (REX, NAT⁷, TEN⁸), I see the need for better cooperation

and possible areas where this could be achieved. I am also an active Member of the [Association Life Category](https://europeanruralparliament.com/)⁹. By representing the EESC at various events (e.g. the [European Rural Parliament](https://www.europeanruralparliament.com/)¹⁰, the [ECOLISE](https://www.ecolise.eu/)¹¹ Day of Sustainable Communities and the [World Urban Forum](https://wuf.unhabitat.org/)¹²), I will continue to boost the Group's visibility.



© Rawpixel.com, Shutterstock

1. ODRAZ, <https://www.odraz.hr/?lang=en>
2. HMRR, <https://hmrr.hr/en/home/>
3. CIVINET Slovenia-Croatia-SEE, <https://civitas.eu/civinet/civinet-slovenia-croatia-see>
4. Croatian Volunteer Development Center, <https://www.hcrv.hr/english>
5. Europe's People's Forum, <https://europepeoplesforum.eu/>
6. EESC, External Relations Section, <https://europa.eu/ijX84ND>
7. EESC, Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment Section, <https://europa.eu/lyq33Bv>
8. EESC, Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and Information Society Section, <https://europa.eu/ikn94kX>
9. EESC, Associational Life Category, <https://europa.eu/IVD38XB>
10. European Rural Parliament, <https://europeanruralparliament.com/>
11. ECOLISE, <https://www.ecolise.eu/>
12. World Urban Forum, <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/>

The EESC Vice-President in charge of Budget from our Group

To lead with the aim of maximising financial efficiency



Krzysztof Pater © EESC

Krzysztof PATER (PL)
*President,
Polish Scouting
and Guiding
Association (ZHP)*

I have been a volunteer at the [Polish Scouting and Guiding Association](#) for over **40 years**¹. I currently serve as its president. I began **my career** as a civil servant dealing with foreign trade issues, then I mainly worked on the development of the Polish capital market and the reform of the pension system. At that time, I developed a detailed concept of the funded pillars of the new pension system. In 2001, I was appointed Deputy Minister for Labour and Social

Policy in the Polish Government, and Minister for Social Policy in 2004. Since 2006, I have been a permanent committee adviser in the [Sejm](#)², currently adviser to the Committee on Petitions. During my career, I have also been an academic teacher, performed labour market research and carried out a wide range of analytical and advisory activities for a wide range of national and international actors, including the [World Bank](#)³ and the [International Labour Organisation](#)⁴.

In taking on the role of **EESC vice-president** with responsibility for leading the work of the Commission for financial and budgetary affairs (CAF), I am fully aware of the tasks ahead of me, as I have been

participating in this work as a Member of the CAF since 2015. I fully intend to **pursue a policy of rational and maximally efficient management of the resources** entrusted to the EESC under the general budget of the European Union. Over the next 30 months, I will focus on improving relations and mutual understanding with the two institutions that have a key impact on the EESC's budget and its clearance – the Council and the European Parliament.

I am convinced that the EESC will be at the forefront of sound financial management among the European Union institutions in 2025.

Our Quaestor

Improving responsiveness towards the needs of EESC Members



Panagiotis Gkofas © EESC

Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL)
*Board Member,
GSEVEE (Hellenic
Confederation
of Professionals,
Craftsmen and
Merchants for SMEs)*

*Member, board of directors, Panhellenic Confederation of Restaurants and Related Businesses (POESE)
President, Academy Avignon for SMEs and crafts
European Commission external expert on food loss and waste*

I was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1965, and then moved to Thessaloniki. I graduated from Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in 1988 in economics, and acquired a Master's degree in food cost analysis from NYU & CIF in New York. I also acquired an MBA from the University of Macedonia (UOM) in Thessaloniki. I played an active role in the municipality of

Kalamaria for several years, as an elected municipality member of the board, and was also elected to the chamber of professions for 10 years. I am in the family food business, running catering and restaurant enterprises. I have been the elected representative of the restaurant sector in [POESE](#)⁵ and [GSEVEE](#)⁶, the most prominent national confederation of SMEs in Greece, for more than 30 years, and have been appointed by the Greek government as a Member of EESC representing GSEVEE and SMEs for several years.

During my mandate **at the EESC**, I have worked effectively with other colleagues and Members of the EESC from different Sections and Groups, on opinions about SMEs, migration, tourism, maritime affairs, civil protection, EU common defence, and have always been open to new ideas, synergies and initiatives which enhance the role of the EESC.

Currently, I am also president of [Academy Avignon for SMEs and crafts](#)⁷ based in Brussels, an organisation established to promote SMEs' interests at European level, with a special focus on green efficiency, training, social dialogue and disaster management.

In my **previous work and new role as a Quaestor**, I focus on strengthening cooperation with and responsiveness towards the needs of EESC Members. In conjunction with the other two Quaestors, and the president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, Séamus Boland, we have tried to create the most

1. Polish Scouting and Guiding Association, <https://zhp.pl/en>
2. Sejm, officially known as the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, is the lower house of the bicameral parliament of Poland, <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/>
3. World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/home>
4. International Labour Organization, <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm>
5. POESE, <https://www.poesegr/>
6. GSEVEE, <https://www.gsevee.gr/en-us/about>
7. Academy Avignon, <https://www.europeansmeacademy.eu/>

appropriate conditions for the EESC's return after the COVID-19 period. This also included the renovation of the

building premises. I will always seek to work with an unbiased approach to solving conflicting issues and everyday

problems that may arise and come under the remit of the Quaestors.

The President of the TEN Section from our Group

Continuing my term of office in the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society



Baiba MILTOVIČA
(LV)
*Board member,
Latvian National
Association
for Consumer
Protection (LPAA)*

Baiba Miltoviča © EESC

*Member, European Consumer
Consultative Group (ECCG)*

Since 2020, I have had the privilege of working with my colleagues on several opinions and activities covering the areas of transport, energy, infrastructure and the information society. I have served as president of the [TEN Section](#)¹ for the last two and a half years, after Members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group entrusted me with this role. During these two and a half years, we have experienced the COVID-19 crisis, mounting energy prices and inflation rates and an increase in energy poverty.

As a consequence of the **war in Ukraine**, energy became the most pressing issue on the TEN Section's

agenda in 2022. In this context, I intend to put forward the voice of organised civil society on European **energy policies** in 2023. We have to move towards the [Green Deal](#)² but must balance this with poorer people's need to provide for themselves, at a time when millions of Europeans are faced with low incomes, high energy expenses and energy-inefficient housing.

The TEN Section will hold the **third edition of its conference on energy poverty** on 19 July 2023 under the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU. The conference will focus on the effectiveness of [REPowerEU](#)³ in tackling energy poverty, its impact on housing conditions, transport poverty and a gender approach to this question.

Furthermore, I would like to continue this work, and I feel empowered about putting forward new

initiatives in the next term of office. We need to further develop our views on the EU's fully-fledged legislative framework for the production of a hydrogen market, access to water, the drone strategy, space policy, the greening transport and freight package, universal access to telecommunications infrastructure and the exploitation of renewable energy resources.

My aspiration is to involve each and every Member in finding synergies and common areas of action to further develop organised civil society's independent advice on EU policies and legislation.



© i am adventure, Shutterstock

The President of the ECO Section from our Group

Starting the term of office of ECO Section President in challenging and turbulent times



Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL)
*President,
Greek National
Confederation of
Disabled People
(ESAMEA)*

Ioannis Vardakastanis © EESC

*President, European Disability Forum
President, International Disability
Alliance (IDA)
Member, Economic and Social Council*

*of Greece (OKE)
Member, Greek National Commission of
Human Rights (EEDA)
Member, National Accessibility
Authority (EAP)*

It is a great honour for me to be elected president of the ECO Section for the period 2023-2025. I bring to this position my long-standing experience from both my professional life and my

involvement in civil society activities. I have served as vice-president of the [ECO Section](#)⁴ on behalf of the Civil

1. EESC, Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, <https://europa.eu/!kn94kX>
2. European Commission, A European Green Deal, <https://europa.eu/!8bB4bR>
3. European Commission, REPowerEU, <https://europa.eu/!wbD6NW>
4. EESC, Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, <https://europa.eu/!RD39rY>

Society Organisations' Group. This has afforded me **in-depth knowledge and experience** in all the areas that ECO covers in the scope of its work. My particular focus, this time, has been on economic, social and territorial cohesion. I have acted as rapporteur for many opinions on cohesion policy, [Next Generation EU](#)¹, the [multiannual financial framework](#)² and many other matters. Beyond my work with the EESC, I have also been **active in civil society organisations for over four**

decades, not only in Greece, but also at EU level and globally.

My main objective during my term of office as ECO Section president will be to work impartially and fairly on behalf of all Members, keeping in mind that every Member provides added value and knowledge that will benefit the Section and the entire Committee. These will be crucial times for the ECO Section. The European Union is weathering a perfect storm

of **economic shocks** provoked by a string of unprecedented crises, both with the COVID-19 pandemic and now with the ongoing aggression against Ukraine. It will be our job to **combine our ideas and experience to guide policymaking** in this area, not just to ensure economic stability within our Union, but also to produce a response that serves the most marginalised groups and ensures the wellbeing of everyone who lives in the EU.

REFLECTIONS

European Year of Skills: Further impetus to counteract skill shortage in the healthcare sector

A comment by OMR Dr. Johannes Steinhart, President of the Austrian Medical Chamber



OMR Dr. Johannes STEINHART
President,
Austrian Medical Chamber

OMR Dr. Johannes Steinhart
© AK Wien /
Anna Rauchenberger

In **healthcare**, in particular, skills are of paramount importance. For this reason, the [Austrian Medical Chamber](#)³ is very pleased that the [European Year of Skills 2023](#)⁴ has been launched as an initiative to highlight the importance of skills and to promote education and training as well as innovation.

The healthcare sector is massively affected by the **shortage of skilled workers**. Unfortunately, in Austria, there is a severe shortage of physicians and the situation is only expected to get worse, especially in the social health insurance sector. Against the backdrop of a steadily growing and ageing population, this might be one of the toughest challenges ahead. In **addressing this shortage**, the greatest and most pressing challenges

over the next few years will be to improve the working conditions for hospital physicians, to increase the attractiveness of the social health insurance sector, to ensure low-threshold healthcare services close to where people live, and to significantly reduce the bureaucratic burden for the medical profession.

The Austrian Medical Chamber hopes that the European Year of Skills 2023 will help to **raise awareness of the skill shortage problem and provide a further impetus to counteract this problem**. Hopefully, the initiative will also have a positive impact on the shortage of physicians in Austria.

A sufficiently qualified workforce not only makes for a more competitive EU, but in the health care sector, in particular, it also guarantees high-quality health care for the European population. **Organised civil society** can support the objectives of the Year by drawing attention to the initiative itself and to other related EU initiatives

as well as to the funding and support opportunities available. The Austrian Medical Chamber is committed to supporting the initiative and looks forward to a successful European Year of Skills 2023.



1. European Commission, [NextGenerationEU](https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en), https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en
2. European Commission, 2021-2027 long-term EU budget, <https://europa.eu/!w8hX47>
3. The Austrian Medical Chamber represents the collective professional, social and economic interests of all physicians working in Austria. It works to preserve and further the public standing and the rights of physicians, while ensuring their compliance with the duties of the medical profession. <https://www.aerztekammer.at/>
4. European Commission, European Year of Skills 2023, <https://europa.eu/!WFC99c>

NEWS FROM THE GROUP

CSOs call for true partnership between electoral and participatory democracy to strengthen EU democracies ahead of the 2024 elections

Civil society organisations (CSOs) must be recognised, involved and supported as partners that defend and strengthen European democracy and contribute to a functioning rule of law culture. They must cooperate to guarantee effective policy dialogue and should be given a status similar to social partners, a true partnership, concluded the conference [Civil society organisations defending and strengthening European democracy](#)¹, organised by the *Civil Society Organisations' Group* of the EESC on 30 March 2023.

Opening the conference, **Séamus Boland**, president of the *Civil Society Organisations' Group*, warned against an ever-shrinking civic space. "Our democracy cannot be taken for granted," he said, stressing the role of independent CSOs in maintaining the resilience of EU democracies. CSOs needed to receive due respect and support and be involved in decision-making processes beyond crisis situations.

With a view to the European elections in 2024, he therefore urged politicians to work towards a true partnership between representatives of electoral and participatory democracy, reminding that "alongside equality, justice, freedom, respect and solidarity, the strength and freedom of civil society organisations are important indicators of the good functioning of democracies".

Mr Boland's call for further support was backed by **Gabriella Civico**, Director of the *Centre for European Volunteering*, representing the EESC *Civil Society Liaison Group*, who said: "CSOs need to be empowered to act as translators and bridge builders to debate the European project with



© EESC

citizens". In the face of apathy and anti-European votes, the 2024 elections will be an opportunity to boost inclusive, civil and democratic dialogue.

Presenting the highlights of the conclusions and recommendations from the [2023 Civil Society Days](#)², Ms Civico also called for the European policy on skills to be co-designed and implemented with civil society and the social partners. "Transversal competences such as critical thinking, democratic and collective management, as well as conflict resolution are the true backbone of a participative liberal democracy," she explained.

From the *European Commission*, **Colin Scicluna**, Head of cabinet to Dubravka Šuica, and **Marie-Hélène Boulanger**, acting director of directorate Just.C, joined the conference to present the Commission's initiatives to protect, support and empower CSOs, particularly with regard to the adoption of the [Defence of Democracy package](#)³ and the review of the [European Democracy Action Plan](#)⁴, which are expected later this year. Ms Boulanger also explained that the Commission and the *European cooperation network on elections*

are developing a handbook of best practises to ensure that people with disabilities find the necessary support to exercise their electoral rights.

MEP Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield spoke about the Parliament's efforts to protect the rule of law and the work of CSOs and suggested that the [annual rule of law report](#)⁵ should include an assessment of the state of fundamental rights at national level. "The EU must ensure that CSOs have the resources to act and promote European values across Europe. They must be protected from attacks from Member States for speaking out," she said.

Presenting the results of the [civic space report 2022](#)⁶, **Waltraud Heller** from the *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights* agreed that based on the Treaties the EU should act against Member States that curtail

1. EESC, conference, <https://europa.eu/lrq3jmr>

2. EESC, Civil Society Days 2023, <https://europa.eu/IVCfJH>

3. European Commission, Defending European democracy, <https://europa.eu/INxFW89>

4. European Commission, European Democracy Action Plan, <https://europa.eu/ImHdH6m>

5. European Commission, 2022 Rule of law report, <https://europa.eu/In9nRvC>

6. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, <https://europa.eu/!gGQnH9>

the rights and room for manoeuvre for CSOs, as civil society contributes to the effective functioning of the rule of law in many ways. She considered recognition, regulation, participation, resources and resilience-building as key areas of action, also suggesting a clear framework on how to implement [Art. 11](#)¹. “The EU should insist more that Member States adhere to Art. 11 when implementing EU laws and policies,” she said.

Drawing attention to the role of CSOs in monitoring and reporting the respect for the rule of law and human rights in the Member States, **Dovilė Juodkaitė**, Member of the [EESC Ad Hoc Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law](#)², explained that “Monitoring is used to demand that public authorities are held responsible and accountable. It helps advocate rule of law and human rights-compliant legal and policy responses”.

Jana Milěřová from *Glopolis* (Czechia) stressed that CSOs strengthen democracy and the rule of law in many ways, in times of relative calm and in times of crisis. This, she underlined, did not only hold true for organisations explicitly involved in the promotion of democracy, but also for those who support vulnerable groups in society, as they have a deep understanding

of the needs and perspectives of the communities they serve.

Anne Esser from *Civil Society Europe* presented the initial findings of the [EnTrust Project](#)³. “Mutual trust between public authorities and CSOs is essential for a constructive civil dialogue,” she said. She explained that, on the one hand, public authorities need to trust CSOs so that organisations are involved in debates and decisions, and that their opinion is valued and has an impact. CSOs, on the other hand, need to be able to trust public authorities that values and goals are shared.

again on high levels of trust and the acceptance of inherent differences.

David Samuelsson of *NOD Sweden* also stressed the importance of CSO cooperation, as it is hard for public authorities and governments to reach the relevant part of civil society because of CSOs’ diversity. “The government and civil society organisations have different objectives, regulations, processes, time frames and funding,” he said. His organisation, *NOD*, serves as a good practice example helping to build bridges between both parties.



Séamus Boland, Colin Scicluna and Gabriella Civico (From left to right) © EESC

Strategic cooperation between CSOs is also key, explained **Anna Herweg** from the Dutch organisation *Groene11*, which unites different environmental organisations. The success of cooperation between CSOs depends

All **recommendations and conclusions** of this conference will be published on the event page in the coming weeks and inform the work of Civil Society Organisations’ Group Members.

Poverty reduction: the EU needs poverty-proof policies

Poverty must always be combated in the EU and in the rest of the world. This is all the more important as the cost of living has increased significantly since the onset of the war in Ukraine. While

civil society organisations provide important solutions to tackle the effects of poverty, it is clear that future policy measures must be poverty-proof. These are the conclusions of a discussion organised by the *Civil Society Organisations’ Group* of the EESC on 22 March 2023. The [event](#)⁴ was attended by high-level guest speakers, including Italy’s Minister for Labour and Social Policies, **Marina Elvira Calderone**.

Séamus Boland, president of the *Civil Society Organisations’ Group*, stressed that, with one in five people in Europe still at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2021⁵, policymakers at all levels could not ignore the fact that poverty remained a problem in the EU. He added that “The motto



All speakers of the thematic debate © EESC

1. EUR-lex, Consolidated version of the Treaty on EU, <https://europa.eu/!qynMy9>
2. EESC, Ad hoc group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law, <https://europa.eu/!gD79MT>
3. EnTrust, <https://entrust-project.eu/>
4. EESC, thematic debate, <https://europa.eu/!x8bgP3>
5. This is equivalent to 95.4 million people, or 21.7% of the EU population in 2021 (Eurostat).

'Leaving no one behind' must not lose its meaning". Poverty was cited as the main reason for people being excluded from workplaces, education and basic health services. It was the single biggest cause of social exclusion and inequality.

In her speech, **Ms Calderone** emphasised that the fight against poverty required significant investment in social and professional networks to take people on a development journey that could upgrade human potential. "It is essential to ensure that public authorities promote autonomous citizens' initiatives through appropriate legal frameworks that enable the development of new organisational forms," said Ms Calderone. "We all need to respond to the different forms of poverty and to the specific needs of the regions."

Carlos Susias, president of the [European Anti-Poverty Network \(EAPN\)](#)¹, stressed the responsibility of governments and public institutions to combat poverty and social exclusion. He believes that social entities should be viewed as partners, collaborators and promoters. Policies to combat poverty or to address its consequences should be developed together with people who have experienced poverty and entities that work with them. **Mr Susias** added that "social policies are decisive in avoiding the consequences of poverty, and economic and fiscal policies are essential in eradicating poverty".

In this context, **Christophe Robert**, Executive Officer of France's [Abbé Pierre Foundation](#)², pointed out that, in addition to the high levels of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion and the 35 million people living in energy poverty in Europe in 2021, food inflation and the rise in property prices had had a major impact on the budgets of the most vulnerable households.

"Every effort must be made to protect the households that are most in difficulty: combating homelessness, increasing minimum social benefits, preventing evictions, targeting and increasing energy support measures, banning electricity disconnections and more," said **Mr Robert**. In this difficult context, civil society had an essential role not only in providing direct assistance where this fell

The latter played a significant role in social cohesion. Participants also called for targeted assistance, for instance for children, older people, minorities and self-employed people, and for measures to overcome obstacles in the job market, including training, reskilling and upskilling. With a view to the green transition and the digital transformation, changes in the job market and in working models



The Civil Society Organisations' Group © EESC

within their remit, but also in shining a light on the difficulties of the most vulnerable and helping to reshape social protection in the Member States and across Europe as a whole.

During the **Q&A sessions**, several speakers emphasised the role of the social economy sector and asked for more support for the important work of civil society organisations. It was mentioned that:

- subsidies or a minimum income would not be enough to lift people out of poverty;
- social dialogue would need to lead to decent incomes and equality in pay;
- decent pensions and satisfactory minimum assistance in the areas of healthcare and housing would be necessary.

had to be taken into account. The participants also suggested reviewing the distribution of wealth in European societies, for instance through progressive taxation policies that did not penalise businesses.

Background information:

'The fight against poverty, and the role of civil society organisations in combatting poverty', will continue to be the overriding priority of the *Civil Society Organisations' Group* after the first half of the EESC 2020-2025 term of office. This priority will apply both in 2023 and throughout the next 2.5-year term of office. The Group's [2023 work programme](#)³ is available on the EESC website.

1. European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), <https://www.eapn.eu/>
2. Abbé Pierre Foundation, <https://www.fondation-abbe-pierre.fr/>
3. EESC, 2023 Work Programme of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, <https://europa.eu/DWXjg8>

Liberal Professions Category focusing on the European Year of Skills

On 17 March 2023, the [EESC's Liberal Professions Category](#)¹ held its first meeting of the year, chaired by Category spokesperson Rudolf Kolbe. The meeting focused on the [European Year of Skills](#)², and kicked off with a **presentation by the European Commission** on its plans for this Year. 2023 should be the year of boosting companies' competitiveness (in particular SMEs) and counteracting labour and skills shortages across Europe. Numerous stakeholders are involved in this European Year, including the European institutions, Member States, social partners, chambers of commerce and industry, education providers and various international organisations. The Commission will launch various

legislative initiatives this year, such as on improving workers' digital skills and the recognition of qualifications of non-EU nationals.

In the **second part** of the meeting, **Elena Córdoba Azcárate** from the International Relations Department at [Unión Profesional](#)³, the Spanish liberal professions confederation, explained why lifelong learning is for the benefit of both employers and employees. The latest technologies can help upgrade skills in an easier way. However, tailor-made approaches remain critical, especially



in the diverse world of liberal professions.

The **next meeting** of the Liberal Professions Category will be the Category's annual flagship event, the [Day of Liberal Professions](#)⁴, on 2 May 2023. [Register](#)⁵ for in-person participation by 27 April or follow the web streaming.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

Beyond the crisis: which way forward for EU energy policy?

On 22 March 2023, the EESC held a debate during its plenary session on the current energy crisis and the way forward for the EU's energy policy in light of the adoption of [opinion TEN/791](#)⁶ on *the State of the energy union 2022*. The debate saw the participation of **Kadri Simson**,



Kadri Simson © EESC

the current Commissioner for Energy.

Commissioner Simson put the current energy situation in

Europe into context by stating that: "Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine not only brought the horror of wars to Europe, but also sent shock waves to our energy markets." She declared that over the past year the EU has navigated the energy crisis with a steady hand, and is moving in the right direction, prioritising the green transition, reducing dependence on Russian gas and ensuring long-term

structural solutions.

Lutz Ribbe, one of the rapporteurs of opinion TEN/791 and Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, bewailed that the Commission's [7th state of the energy union report](#)⁷ does not address the political objectives of the [energy union strategy](#)⁸, including the question how the Commission and the Member States intend to ensure that citizens will be at the heart of the Union's energy policy and can become active on the energy market.



Lutz Ribbe © EESC

The following Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group took the floor: President **Séamus Boland** and **TEN Section**⁹ president **Baiba Miltoviča**.

Mr Boland urged that: "For the EU, renewables are the best way to end

energy decency. We need a citizens' approach. We need to involve citizens and citizens' organizations in everything we do regarding the just energy transition. Without citizens involvement, we cannot achieve the goals set out in the various international agreements." **Ms Miltoviča** recommended that the EU, together with the Member States, adopt uniform measures to ensure effective solutions and a level-playing field for all in the context of the current challenges on the energy market.

1. EESC, Liberal Professions Category, <https://europa.eu/!MJ76wG>
2. European Commission, European Year of Skills, <https://europa.eu/!WFC99c>
3. Unión Profesional, <https://unionprofesional.com/>
4. EESC, Day of the Liberal Professions 2023, <https://europa.eu/!xWMGc3>
5. EESC, registration, https://dyn.eesc.europa.eu/event/sessions?id=European_Day_of_the_Liberal_Professions409875135
6. EESC, opinion TEN/791, <https://europa.eu/!RCMBYG>
7. European Commission, 7th report on the state of the energy union, <https://europa.eu/!3JYJ7Y>
8. European Commission, energy union, <https://europa.eu/!CGH7hd>
9. EESC Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society.

Towards strong, inclusive and resilient labour markets in the EU

The second debate of the EESC's March plenary session focused on EU labour markets, with the participation



Marina Elvira Calderone
© EESC

of **Marina Elvira Calderone**, Italy's Minister of Labour and Social Policy, who has also previously been an EESC Member.

This debate was linked to the adoption of the [SOC/750 opinion](#)¹ on *Strengthening the role and independence of equality bodies*.

Ms Calderone expressed that since 2008 there have been different crises affecting Europe, including the economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war on Ukraine. It is therefore more important than ever to ensure an inclusive and resilient labour market, especially for children, women and refugees. "For some social

groups there are still huge obstacles to accessing labour markets and social protection", Ms Calderone stated. She acknowledged the important role of civil society and, alongside the Committee, shared the same goals of the Commission's proposal to strengthen equality bodies.

The rapporteurs of the opinion, **Sif Holst** and Nicoletta Merlo, believed that failing to properly



Sif Holst © EESC

take into account intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination, in the Commission proposal for a directive on standards for equality bodies in the Member States, would be a missed opportunity. **Ms Holst**, who is a Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, emphasised

that the issue of intersectionality was an important element. For example, as a woman with a disability, she encounters discrimination both as a woman and as a person with a disability. This cannot be separated into different boxes.

During the debate, **Séamus Boland**, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group stressed: "labour markets and equality: we must connect them both". **Pietro Barbieri**, vice-president of the Group, further emphasised the importance of minimum standards to ensure equality, non-discrimination and poverty reduction across the European Union.

EESC President Christa Schweng closed the debate by stressing the importance of upskilling, reskilling and creating inclusive labour markets.

Building partnerships with civil society to accelerate implementation of the SDGs

At its March plenary session, the EESC hosted **Ambassador Lachezara Stoeva**, President of the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), for a debate on civil society's critical role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)² and the [2030 Agenda](#)³.

UN Ambassador Stoeva stressed: "We cannot do anything without civil



Lachezara Stoeva © EESC

society. European civil society has often played a leadership role in forward-looking thinking. The EESC, with its multi-stakeholder nature, has the ability to contribute and make public policies more balanced, equitable and responsive."

The EESC Members welcomed the signal from the ECOSOC regarding

stronger cooperation with the EESC. The creation of an EESC platform working on the SDGs will strengthen the link between the two institutions, promoting the structural engagement of civil society, youth organisations, businesses and trade unions.

The EESC has been working for many years on the implementation of the SDGs. It has actively [contributed to the first EU Voluntary Review](#)⁴ of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which will be presented by a supranational entity at the [High-Level Political Forum](#)⁵ in July and joined the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)⁶ in order to feed the European perspective into the UN implementation process. More specifically, for the upcoming HLPF the Committee has been developing a "model" contribution from civil society, which could be used as best practice for other regions around the world.

Four Members from the Civil Society Organisations' Group took part in the debate:

Christian Moos highlighted that the implementation of the SDGs required cooperation between free and unfree societies. Yet liberal democracy, civic space and the rule of law needed to be protected.



Arnaud Schwartz © EESC

Arnaud Schwartz, president of the [Committee's Sustainable Development Observatory](#)⁷, emphasised that empowering CSOs

1. EESC, opinion SOC/750, <https://europa.eu/!YXX4vn>
2. United Nations, SDGs, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
3. United Nations, 2030 Agenda, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
4. EESC, news, <https://europa.eu/!JfHhKp>
5. United Nations, event, <https://hlpf.un.org/2023>
6. United Nations, HLPF, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>
7. EESC, SDO, <https://europa.eu/!Ht88Vb>

was vital for the EU to be able to implement the 2030 Agenda. It would also improve the chances of securing a peaceful, democratic and sustainable future.

Danko Relić underlined that everyone must be involved in working towards the SDGs. "We should actively seek out those who need help; the places to take action are where people actually live."

Finally, **Luca Jahier** said that policy must address all SDGs, not just some, and concluded with a good practise report from his home country Italy.

United for Democracy: EESC adopts resolution

Civic education, better funding for social partners and other civil society organisations (CSOs) and a focus on the local dimension are key to democracy in Europe, agreed policy-makers, experts, and organised civil society representatives in a debate that was held on the second day of the EESC plenary session in March. The debate on a sustainable democratic future was linked to the adoption of an EESC Resolution entitled [United for Democracy](#)¹.

Věra Jourová, Vice-President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, **Daryna Onyshko**, President of the European Democracy Youth Network, **Brikena Xhomaqui**, Co-chair of the EESC Liaison Group, **Liina Carr**, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and **Ken Godfrey**, Executive Director of the European Partnership for Democracy, took part in the debate.

The [Democracy Index 2022](#)² shows that global democracy is declining. In the EU, ten Member States are witnessing authoritarian shifts that threaten fundamental rights. The civic space is shrinking, and the ability of these countries to provide critical public goods to their citizens is under threat.

Against this backdrop, **Commissioner Jourová** recognised in the debate



Věra Jourová © EESC

the crucial role played by CSOs in defending and promoting democracy, often working in spaces where states have failed. "Active participation of people is not only desired but highly necessary. Democracy is under a stress test and we need to do much more to protect it and regain the trust of our people."



Séamus Boland © EESC

The president of the CSOs Group, **Séamus Boland**, who was one of the rapporteurs for the EESC resolution, said:

"Our democracy cannot be taken for granted. It has to be nurtured and protected every day. Independent civil society organisations have a crucial role to play. They act as positive agents of change and are crucial in communicating the benefits of democracy. They must be recognised and given the necessary means to carry out their work."

Justyna Kalina Ochędzan reminded participants that "Democracy is not only big ideas, it is our ordinary life, ordinary choices and responsibility for each other. We learn it at school, at home, at work and from each other. Democracy is as strong as we feel we need it".



Justyna Kalina Ochędzan © EESC



Andris Gobiņš © EESC

In order to strengthen civil dialogue and democracy and the backbone of democracy, CSOs, **Andris Gobiņš**

emphasised the Committee's call for concrete action, including a separate pillar for civil society in the forthcoming [European Democracy Action Plan](#)³.

Ágnes Cser called for the protection of the rights of national minorities, both during war and peace time, and for the support and implementation of successful [European Citizens' Initiatives](#)⁴.

According to **Krzysztof Stanisław Balon**: "Civil dialogue should be lifted to the same level as social dialogue at European and national level". At EU level, [Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union](#)⁵ needs to be implemented effectively. This includes a European strategy for civil society and a European Statute of Associations.

Following the debate, the **EESC adopted its resolution**, which builds on the recommendations of this year's [Civil Society Days](#)⁶. The resolution aims to strengthen democracy by increasing citizens' participation, and reinforce the structures for participatory democracy. It includes practical proposals to strengthen democracies and democratic values across the EU. Read it at: <https://europa.eu/!DBKMJ8>

1. EESC resolution, United for Democracy, <https://europa.eu/!DBKMJ8>
2. EIU, Democracy Index 2022, https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/?utm_source=eu-website&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=democracy-index-2022
3. European Commission, European Democracy Action Plan, <https://europa.eu/!mHDH6m>
4. European Union, ECI, <https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/en>
5. EUR-LEX, Consolidated version of the Treaty on EU, <https://europa.eu/!qynMy9>
6. EESC, Civil Society Days 2023, <https://europa.eu/!VCJfJH>

OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 22 and 23 March 2023. The EESC plenary adopted 20 opinions and one resolution. 9 opinions were drafted by Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

Benjamin RIZZO (MT), co-rapporteur, [ECO/604](#)¹ Administrative cooperation in taxation (DAC 8)

Cillian LOHAN (IE), co-rapporteur, [NAT/874](#)² Revision of the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking

Kęstutis KUPŠYS (LT), rapporteur, [ECO/602](#)³ Listing rules for public markets (Listing act)

Lutz RIBBE (DE), rapporteur, [TEN/791](#)⁴ State of the Energy Union 2022

Michael McLOUGHLIN (IE), rapporteur, [REX/566](#)⁵ Youth action plan in the EU external action

Rudolf KOLBE (AT), rapporteur, [TEN/794](#)⁶ Wooden construction for CO2 reduction in building sector

Séamus BOLAND (IE), rapporteur, [EESC resolution entitled "United for democracy"](#)⁷

Sif HOLST (DK), rapporteur, [SOC/750](#)⁸ Strengthening the role and independence of equality

Stoyan TCHOUKANOV (BG), rapporteur, [NAT/887](#)⁹ Carbon Removal Certification

Zsolt KÜKEDI (HU), co-rapporteur, [TEN/798](#)¹⁰ Digitalising the energy system - EU action plan

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's [website](#)¹¹.

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on **14 and 15 June 2023**. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#)¹².

A list including all **new work appointments** of Civil Society Organisations' Group Members is available on the Committee's [website](#)¹³.

UPCOMING EVENTS

02/05/2023 – Day of the Liberal Professions 2023

Further information, registration and web streaming: <https://europa.eu/!xWMgc3>

25/05/2023 – Conference on 'Health, Care and Prosperity after COVID-19: Swedish and European perspectives'; further information: <https://europa.eu/!Q9nDny>

1. EESC opinion ECO/604, <https://europa.eu/!krXNqm>
2. EESC opinion NAT/874, <https://europa.eu/!kWFT6v>
3. EESC opinion ECO/602, <https://europa.eu/!DXMnfh>
4. EESC opinion TEN/791, <https://europa.eu/!RCMBYG>
5. EESC opinion REX/566, <https://europa.eu/!FpwTQw>
6. EESC opinion TEN/794, <https://europa.eu/!TBmjmj>
7. EESC, resolution, <https://europa.eu/!DBKMJ8>
8. EESC opinion SOC/750, <https://europa.eu/!YXX4vn>
9. EESC opinion NAT/887, <https://europa.eu/!Qr3rYD>
10. EESC opinion TEN/798, <https://europa.eu/!gmwXBx>
11. EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/!wF86wY>
12. EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/!Dg84qG>
13. EESC, New work appointments, <https://europa.eu/!DgvXdk>

Like us on facebook:



CSOGroupEESC

Follow us on Twitter:



@CSOGroupEESC

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

Editors: Alissia Bourguignon, Tim Gemers,
Jasmin Klötzing and Margarida Reis
Editor in Chief: Fausta Palombelli

Secretariat of the Civil Society Organisations' Group,
European Economic and Social Committee,
99 Rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels
Tel. +32 (0)2 546 9548

Print
QE-AG-23-001-EN-C
ISSN 2467-4451

Web
QE-AG-23-001-EN-N
ISSN 2467-446X

THE EESC IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONTENT OF EXTERNAL WEBSITES

© European Union, 2023 • Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

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

EESC-2023-33-EN