



European Economic  
and Social Committee

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# Diversity Europe Newsletter



**THE FUTURE OF FOOD**

# FOREWORD

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*President, Diversity Europe Group*

## Europe in peril



The Members of the Diversity Europe Group are mostly of an age where we do not directly remember World War II. Of course we know about

it. We are aware of the stories told by our parents and the horrendous and unnecessary loss of life. We said it would be the last time humanity would do this and at least for seventy-six years - apart from the Balkan wars in the early 90s - we managed to build a civilised Europe under the aegis of the European Union.

On 24 February Russia invaded the Ukraine, shattering the belief that civilisation was beyond the vile practice of crossing with violent intent the borders of a sovereign state. As a non NATO country, Ukraine was vulnerable, a fact used by President Putin to remind other non NATO or neutral States that they could become targets, if their change their status.

From a civil society perspective, this war represents the greatest of all challenges. It is predicted that many millions of refugees will leave Ukraine, with the vast bulk of that number being women, children and the elderly. They will need massive support ranging from basic food and shelter, to medical and employment support. All countries in the EU will need to step up and do their part in facilitating this and much of this burden will and is falling on civil society organisations.

Equally many millions left behind are more likely to be extremely vulnerable in terms of health and absolute poverty.

Somehow aid will have to be delivered in war circumstances to these areas and again, more likely by the range of civil society organisations active in the area. As part of this, civil society action, many Members of the Diversity Europe Group are involved directly. It is a heroic involvement and demonstrates the quality as well as organisational capacity of our Members.

While other issues still preoccupy our daily work, it is a challenge that we do not forget issues such as climate change, the work of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE<sup>1</sup>) and indeed the issue of food security, which was discussed at the **European Summit of Cities and Regions**<sup>2</sup> organised by the Committee of the Regions in Marseilles recently. Our Group's **conference**<sup>3</sup> held in Paris on 2 March, was the first outside event since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference, was timely and held against the background of Ukraine it became even more real. The sharp dependency on fossil fuels linked to the even sharper dependency of Europe on imported fossil fuels, highlights the urgent need for our economies and societies to develop renewable fuels at an even greater speed. The conference clearly pointed to the urgency of the EU to urgently invest all necessary resources in bringing all elements of our society to a carbon neutral state, especially families who do not have their own resources to make the necessary changes.

The CoFoE represents, in many ways how not to conduct a consultative process. The effective exclusion of civil society, which by the way accounts for millions of citizens who deliver a range of services to

those who are unable to help themselves, reinforces a fear that these citizens are always left on the outside. The reality is that, without the involvement of civil society, many of the recommendations emanating from the citizen's panels will fail to be implemented.

Séamus Boland

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<sup>1</sup> Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> European Summit of Cities and Regions, <https://europa.eu/1ckXNdc>

<sup>3</sup> EESC, conference on 'Climate Change and Energy Transition', <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/climate-change-and-energy-transition>

## The consumers' appetite towards the future of food



Monique GOYENS  
Director General, BEUC<sup>1</sup>

The food of our future needs to address the challenges of the climate and biodiversity crises, and the transformation that this calls for needs to bring people along – we all need to change the way we eat. The magnitude of the needed transformation that lies ahead of us demands an urgent, massive switch towards more sustainable food production and consumption. It is crucial to support consumers in that journey, and not to leave them alone responsible for shifting their diets. Policies need to be designed to make the sustainable option the most attractive one: easy, accessible and affordable.

Food habits have strong cultural roots and it would be ill advised to ban consumption of certain types of food, such as meat. A smarter approach would be to recomfort consumers that they are already part of the solution if they reduce their meat consumption, or to roll out public or commercial schemes that reduce support to the less sustainable food options and provide incentives for eating more vegetables, more fruit, more pulses, more seasonal, more local. It is also vital to clearly make the link between a sustainable and a healthy diet: caring for your own health while caring for the environment might be an important trigger for consumers' changing behaviours.

There are plenty of opportunities to reinvent our food environment towards more sustainability. All

links of the supply chain have a crucial role to play to support these developments. Our role as a consumer organisation has various angles: as an EU advocacy force, we proactively contribute to setting an ambitious EU-wide regulatory framework that provides the right signals to farmers, food producers, retailers and consumers, so that the sustainable food is the most attractive one. As a network of national consumer organisations, we reach out to consumers to provide them with information and advice on how to shift to more sustainable diets – demonstrating



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to them, that there is also a healthy option, and if smartly used, this can also be the most affordable and tasty one. In short, advocacy towards policymakers and consumer awareness raising are two sides of the same coin. Let's tackle both when redesigning the way we eat.

<sup>1</sup> Beuc, <https://www.beuc.eu/>

## Let me be unequivocal



John COMER (IE)  
President, Irish Creamery  
Milk Suppliers Association  
Co-spokesperson, EESC  
Farmer's Category

The environment must be managed in a way that ensures that future generations are able to enjoy the resources of our planet.

For this to happen, **farmers need to be paid for their skills and capital investments**, which are all required to produce quality sustainable food for the citizens of our continent and beyond. Consumers are worried – and are being encouraged to worry – about the **inflation of food prices**.

Now, time for some facts: the average EU family spends roughly half of what their parents did on food as a percentage of net disposable income.

People have been systematically underpaying for their food for at least 25 years. Successive governments have looked on without so much as a bat squeak of protest while our **corporate retailers effectively took over our food supply chain** and relentlessly cut the prices being paid backwards through the processors and co-ops to the primary producers, our farmers, while using food as a "loss-leader" to generate footfall and custom on higher margin goods by selling dairy, beef and vegetables at prices often below the cost of production. The consumers got superb quality food for less than the cost of producing it.

The politicians were happy because the consumers were happy. The corporate retailers were happy because they had manipulated the farmers into subsidising their food promotions. And the farmers? Well, the **number of viable farms in Europe continues to**

**decline** dramatically. It is difficult to be accurate with the figures available but, as an example, at the end of the last century Denmark had 10 356 dairy farmers; now, Denmark only has 2675 dairy farmers and this is falling year on year.

So, to sum up: The **money from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**<sup>1</sup> was always, and still is, a **consumer subsidy**, not a farmer subsidy. In order to maintain a safe and secure supply of sustainable food for our people, EITHER the CAP budget will need to be significantly increased or the price we pay for food will have to increase substantially.

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Common Agricultural Policy, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy_en)

## Our future diet will be varied



**Jarmila DUBRAVSKÁ (CZ)**  
Director, Common Agricultural Policy and Internal Audit, Czech Chamber of Agriculture

Food is at the heart of our existence. **To enjoy a good-quality life, we need good-quality food** and we don't need to look far for evidence of this. One example is the human brain. In the past, humans changed their diet and switched from a purely plant-based diet to one enriched with animal proteins, bringing about a fundamental change in our lives. The development of our brains, driven by essential amino acids, has changed our entire existence. We became homo sapiens, able to make simple tools, start building homes and found settlements. Not only did we harvest crops and hunt wild animals, we also began to breed animals in captivity and grow our own crops for the first time, making flour from grain, baking bread... and our evolution continued. As things developed, the number of people working in agriculture gradually fell, fundamentally changing

the ratio of farmers to other professions. Today, a small number of farmers can feed millions of people. However, **food should not be taken for granted** and, although efficiency is high, the process is still dependent on people. Humans need to be constantly involved in order to oversee or operate machinery, but above all to look after the animals.

Yet the importance of food is not limited to our lives. How we produce food is also directly connected to the environment in which we live. Our lives are a cycle: we are born, we grow, become wiser, gain knowledge and experience, handing them down to our children and grandchildren, before passing away when our time comes. Food also has its own cycle. Although we can now use chemical processes to produce many foods artificially, this is not the basis of our diet. During crop production, soil is aerated and we need livestock manure to help crops grow. Crop-growing supplies the soil with air, retaining water that is needed for the creatures that live in the soil and cultivate it. This is the basis for biodiversity and our environment.

And what will **our diet be like in the future?** The answer is it **will be varied**. Apart from food made largely from farm produce, we will eat fruit and vegetables we can grow in greenhouses using rainwater, energy from the sun, applying bio-safety methods. Small areas can produce large yields, but above all good-quality fruit and vegetables, which have a natural aroma and an authentic taste because they grow in the right conditions. Much more food will come from local and regional sources, meaning that we don't need to transport it thousands of kilometres, and with fruit reaching our tables ripe and fresh. While our diets will certainly be enriched by the latest **scientific "innovations"**, as with the cars we use for work and leisure, or the apartments and houses in which we live, most people will find a middle way, i.e. the most natural approach for our lives.

## The rat race in retail must have boundaries



**Ronny LANNOO (BE)**  
General Adviser, Belgian Union of Self-Employed Entrepreneurs, SMEs and liberal professionals (UNIZO)

The **price war** between major European supermarket chains has been raging for years and has now reached the **food sector** as well. The supermarket chains are also putting suppliers under pressure. SMEs,

including farmers, are forced to supply their products at ever lower costs, which threatens the viability of their business models.

With promotions like buy one get one, two or even up to five free, tying practices that are legal under EU law have gone beyond reasonable limits. A number of Member States have now realised this. France has now banned buy one get one free promotions in order to alter the balance in the food supply chain.

Consumer protection continues to be important, but there are other ways to achieve this than low prices. **Legislation must also be adapted in the EU in the interests of consumers, quality and employment.** Every link in the food supply chain is entitled to **fair remuneration**. If France can achieve this, so can the other Member States. In Belgium, the Flemish parliament adopted a resolution with a large majority to clamp down on giveaway prices among large retailers.

The Belgian federation of independent supermarkets thinks that the European Commission should also consider whether the market should be dominated by a limited number of players and whether this is in the interest of genuine free competition. Well over 90% of farmers and other businesses in the food supply chain are micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. These are the first victims

# The urgency of the EU Green Deal



Marta MASSA  
Director, European Office,  
Slow Food Europe

**Slow Food**<sup>1</sup> envisions a world where everyone can enjoy food that is good for them, good for the people who grow it, and good for the planet. In the EU, we demand the full realisation of the ambition of the **Farm to Fork**<sup>2</sup> and **Biodiversity**<sup>3</sup> strategies to overcome the multiple crises we are facing: the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, the global pandemic. The war in Ukraine, the latest in this list of alarming crises, adds **urgency to the need to achieve sustainable food systems in Europe**<sup>4</sup>.

There is no doubt that there are a variety of views and expectations on the future of food. But there is also no doubt that “business as usual” is no longer possible. The latest **IPCC report**<sup>5</sup> reaffirms that unsustainable agricultural expansion and unbalanced diets are increasing vulnerability to climate impacts and creating resource competition.

Short-sighted interests and the productivist narrative are pushing us to find solutions in techno-fixes, further consolidating agri-food giants. These have failed to deliver. In 2019, an estimated 690 million people were hun-

gry and upwards of 2 billion lacked regular access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food. This was before COVID-19 added approximately 130 million people to the world’s hungry. The opportunity resides in rooting food systems in diversity, agroecology, and human rights. Data shows that agroecological systems can compete with industrial agriculture in terms of total outputs, perform strongly under environmental stress and sustain yields over time, providing a basis for secure farm livelihoods and supplying diverse diets and improved health.

Communities and social movements around the world are jumping in to fill gaps and address the vulnerabilities left by mainstream systems – from mutual aid networks to localised food provisioning and emergency food distribution schemes, bridging the urban-rural divide. Civil society is fluid and can quickly adapt. Most importantly, civil society brings together a diversity of people who strive for the common good.

Slow Food, for its part, is on the front-line defending biodiversity and eco-

systems, promoting agroecological farmers, fishers and food artisans, paying special attention to indigenous people, youth, women and migrant communities, and championing agroecology, small-scale family farming and social justice as a response to the challenges of our times. We cultivate a global network of local communities who defend cultural and biological diversity, promote food education and advocate for more just and equitable food policies. Slow Food has grown to involve millions of people in more than 160 countries worldwide.



© Jacopo Miceli, Slow Food Archive

- 1 Slow Food, <https://www.slowfood.com/>
- 2 European Commission, Farm to Fork strategy, [https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-to-fork-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-to-fork-strategy_en)
- 3 European Commission, Biodiversity strategy for 2030, [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en)
- 4 Slow Food, Joint open letter: EU food supply and solidarity response to the war in Ukraine, <https://www.slowfood.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Joint-open-letter-EU-food-supply-and-solidarity-response-to-the-war-in-Ukraine-March-2022.pdf>
- 5 United Nation, IPCC report 2022, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/resources/press/press-release>

in this rat race to the lowest price. Creating real added value is the biggest advantage of the EU. Could this be a good opportunity?

**Competition based only on price has no future** because someone along the supply chain always ends up paying for it. At the moment, this is mainly farmers, SMEs and their employees, but also consumers because **there can be no quality without a fair price.**

## Agriculture in Malta: the main issues

The civil society committee within the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD<sup>6</sup>) has presented its **paper on agriculture** in Malta recently.

In the context of this issue of the Diversity Europe Newsletter on the future of food, the paper seems to me



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Financial and management consultant  
President, Civil Society Committee,  
Malta Council for Economic and Social  
Development (MCESD) Vice-President,  
Malta Federation of Professional  
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Vice-President, European Council of  
Liberal Professions

very relevant as it points to **challenges facing the agricultural sector in Malta** that may also apply to other parts of the European Union as well. In the following, I therefore share a

6 MCESD, <https://mcesd.org.mt/>

number of the points raised in the paper for further consideration.

The **ageing farming population** is now at a level of concern. Most farmers are nearing pensionable age and their children do not want to follow in their parents' footsteps, as the work is deemed to be too hard. Coupled with this is the very traditional way of doing the work, with considerable time spent in the fields (practically daily). To this, one must add the **change in climate**, with less rainfall and thus water storage and irrigation are becoming more costly. Some fields are too small for certain machinery to be utilised, so economies of scale do not come into play.

There is also the issue of **constitutional case-law**, which has favoured landowners who wish to take farmland back and use it for other purposes. This has sounded another death knell for the industry, as agricultural land will diminish dramatically. The government's position on this issue is that it cannot purchase all the land from existing landowners.

**Imported pesticides** are not being tested regularly, as laboratories are small and overworked, which means that pesticides might be doing more harm than good. This has also impacted the dwindling **number of bees**, thus doing further damage to farming. Hornets have also increased, which has led to even fewer local bees. Importing foreign bees is not having the desired effect, as the imported bees are failing to thrive away from the climate and nectars to which they were accustomed.

Another issue is food security and Malta's **increased dependence on imported foods**, which became clear during COVID-19, when ports in Malta were closed, thus increasing prices due to the effects of supply and demand.



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## COMMENTS ON CURRENT AFFAIRS

### The war in Ukraine, Europe confronted with its past



**Alain COEUR (BE)**  
President, EESC INT section  
Director, European and International Affairs,  
National Union of Socialist Mutual Health Funds (UNMS)

Once again, today we must sadly commemorate those who are sacrificing their lives for democracy.

When it comes to war, it is worth recalling this quote by **Paul Valéry**: "War is a massacre of people who don't know each other, for the profit of people who know each other but don't massacre each other".

**European nations have a troubled history:** after seven years of dictatorship by colonels, democracy returned to Greece in 1974; after 37 years of General Franco's dictatorship, democracy returned to **Spain** from 1975; after 41 years under the authoritarian Estado Novo regime, the Carnation Revolution marked the return of democracy to **Portugal** in 1974; after 45 years of totalitarian regime, the **Eastern countries** witnessed the return of their freedom after the fall of the Berlin wall on 9 November 1989; and the **Yugoslav wars** took place on the doorstep of the EU between 1991 and 2001. We cannot erase the vastness of this suffering from the memories of European citizens. Will Ukraine be the last burden we have to bear? Sooner or later, Ukraine will be a member of the EU, following historical patterns.

We would be well advised to give careful consideration to this quote by **Edgar Morin**: "One of the greatest lessons in my experience, is that barbarity can always return. **No historical wins are irreversible**".

Our **western democracies are an unprecedented success**; this success is the fruit of much suffering, work,

effort, goodwill and, above all, many creative ideas in different areas. The result is that a larger number of people live better and longer lives, with more freedom, than ever before.

This is the path we have chosen since 1957; however, I want to stress that democracy is not the prerequisite for economic development, it is essential for the freedom of people. To ensure the free movement of goods, of capital, we need democracy; it must be applied to all areas of our lives.

Pericles, in **Thucydides'** text (around 460 B.C.) says "It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few".

But beyond a certain, varying level, aggression, greed, egoism, conflicts, declining solidarity and oppression destroy the sense of "we" and togetherness, and trigger waves of resentment. The human species has known this for thousands of years.

Today, we know that giant techno-economic machines are colonising minds and political powers, and are imposing requirements on society that are never the subject of specific democratic debate. It seems that for some, this is the dream: a democracy without democrats.

Tribe, clan, nationality, race, sex, class are used to extremes and propelled by the certainty of being right, even though we are all capable of being wrong, both alone and as a group.

Every **dictatorship** sentences citizens, against their conscience and moral beliefs, to collaborating with evil, even if only through their silence. Depriving them of responsibility diminishes them. Some of them fight back, at the expense of their lives. Autocrats adapt: they use every censorship and intimidation technique to restrict freedom, first for individuals, then associations and civil society as a whole.

To escape centuries-long ideologies, the war of all against all, can we not try to shed light on the fact that a **human being's biggest asset lies in social learning**? We are born to learn, to develop connections.

As **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry** said: "A democracy must be a fraternity; if not it is a sham".

The following quote by philosopher **Abdenour Bidar** can be used to conclude: "[...] **Fraternity** brings us back to the very essence of our humanity, namely the first proof of the fact that we are nothing without one another. Therefore, it is sacred, meaning it is indisputable and indispensable. Helping each other, the desire to build connection, to give support, to reduce

differences, to give everyone a chance and to share the expertise of free and responsible social actors".

We cannot constantly live with negative emotions, distrust, humiliation, resentment, fear – manipulated over and over again by some – populists, nationalists, extremists on all sides!

In the EU's core area, the **urgency for a new realistic and inspiring narrative** appears to be of paramount importance; this is a necessity for 447 million EU inhabitants. Everything has been said about Europe's shortcomings, without really making an effort to methodically gather the opinions of those who, at some point, have contributed and continue to contribute to the European project.

All in all, is it that hard to give Europeans back the certainty that it is better to be in Europe than elsewhere in the world? If national interests continue to prevail systematically over collective ones, we will see large-scale disintegration, populism and nationalism. Have we forgotten the peace and prosperity since the 1950s, the welfare state in all EU countries, respect of human rights, pluralism embodied by democracy...?

Our psychological maturity is a key challenge for democracy. It is time to give the floor to those who wish to work together to provide a future for young people. **We need more Europe!** The tragedy in Ukraine will, I hope, be the driving force for raising awareness that our future is a shared one.

## No greenwashing in the EU taxonomy



**Jan DIRX (NL)**  
Vice-President, Diversity Europe Group  
Liaison Officer, Groene11 (Green11), Dutch nature and environmental organisations

The EESC's **Consumers and Environment Category**<sup>1</sup> has adopted a position concerning the current **debate on the EU taxonomy**, and has issued a **statement** setting out that position. That statement is summarised below.

In order to achieve the **EU's 2030 climate and energy goals**, it is essential for investment to be targeted at sustainable projects and activities, which is why the European Commission has created a classification system for sustainable economic activities, known as the **European taxonomy for sustainable activities**<sup>2</sup> ("EU taxonomy"). The EESC supported the Commission's initiative to create the EU taxonomy, and continues to do so.

The Commission has established two rules to determine what can be included on the EU taxonomy list:

1. The investment must contribute to achieving one or more of the following objectives in order to be classified as "green": climate change mitigation; adapting to climate change; protecting or restoring biodiversity; improving the circular economy; pollution prevention and control; and sustainable management of water resources.
2. The investment must not cause significant damage.

From the outset, there were heated discussions and heavy lobbying over whether **nuclear energy and natural gas** activities could be included in the EU taxonomy list. Based on the two rules, the answer, for our Category, is clear: no, **they do not belong on the list**.

However, on 2 February 2022 the European Commission adopted in principle a **complementary delegated act**<sup>3</sup> to the Taxonomy Regulation, **including certain nuclear and natural gas** activities on the EU taxonomy list.



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In the view of the Consumers and Environment Category, this is contrary to the EU taxonomy's original goal of combating greenwashing and clarifying what can be regarded as an environmentally sustainable investment from a scientific point of view. **The Category therefore calls for this delegated act not to be brought into force.**

1 EESC, Consumers and Environment Category, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/eu-taxonomy-sustainable-activities\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/eu-taxonomy-sustainable-activities_en)  
2 European Commission, EU taxonomy for sustainable activities, <https://europa.eu/WV46yv>  
3 European Commission, complementary climate delegate act, <https://europa.eu/lwkkrdw>

## Pluralism, liberal corporatism and liberal democracy in Europe



**Christian MOOS (DE)**  
President, EESC EU-Transatlantic Relations Follow-Up Committee, Divisional Director, European and International Affairs, German Civil Servants Association (dbb), Secretary-General, Europa-Union Germany Board Member, European Movement Germany (EBD)

The world is looking into the abyss of the war Putin's Russia has begun. The Ukrainians are resisting, they are suffering, but they are determined to defend their freedom, and European civil society once more is showing its value in the unfolding humanitarian crisis. Throughout Europe, the contours of a new reality are coming into focus.

And Europe? The EU may finally find the new narrative which it has been missing for quite some time. Until fairly recently, however, the European Union seemed to be uninspired and apathetic, complacently letting its future drift by. Since last autumn, a many-headed (yet strangely toothless) monstrosity of a [conference](#)<sup>1</sup>, more or less unknown to the European public, has been debating the future of the EU with 800 randomly selected citizens with, it is to be feared, few consequences.

Governments in particular have been proving neither willing nor able to take responsibility for their community beyond Europe's day-to-day operations. A few representatives of organised civil society were observers to this alarmingly feeble process, which will reach its conclusion on Europe Day (9 May), of all days, but their role remained marginal. Real participation is different.

What will come out of this conference? If not for the existential menace Europe is now facing it would most certainly have been non-binding recommendations that the Commission would say fit in marvellously with its

work programme and strategy. And now? Is it conceivable that despite the dramatically deteriorating geopolitical environment for Europe, the **Member States' governments have no ambition** to bring the European project up to date?

We can only call on governments to take a close look at who is organising help for the refugees. Can our leaders afford to talk to randomly selected citizens rather than to representatives of **organised civil society**? The latter, it is true, could have their own interests and are often part of a corporatism that nowadays appears old-fashioned to many who cast their nets on social media, seeking direct contact with people. This creates suspicion of organised civil society, even if it and its many volunteers promote public policy objectives and organise political participation in a democratic way.

Politicians, both in Brussels and in the Member States, so far have failed to recognise the **fundamental impor-**

**tance of a pluralistic civil society** for the cohesion of our European society, which, for all its cultural differences and regional and national traditions, has long since developed shared identities on key political issues. They also disregard its importance to political stability and the stability of our European order.

The liberal corporatism of **organised civil society**, as reflected in particular in the EESC, is a **guarantee of liberal democracy in Europe**. Thousands of organisations, trade unions and associations bring together the bulk of the EU's 450 million citizens, who often belong to several civil society organisations at the same time. They are a catalyst for societal processes and new ideas, an important intermediary, and also an automatic stabiliser, which makes them particularly valuable in times of change and turmoil.



© Shutterstock

1 Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu/>

# NEWS FROM THE GROUP

## Civil society organisations from the EU27 call for immediate climate action led under their auspices

Civil society organisations from across Europe called at a conference in Paris for just, fair and inclusive climate and energy transitions that involve citizens, civil society organisations and in particular young people. They consider dialogue, cooperation and coordination at all levels a prerequisite for success as well as heavy investment in preparing emergency plans and in adapting to the changing climate and the energy transition. Sustainable financial resources, backed up by strong commitments from public authorities, business, civil society and citizens, should be increased, as should renewable, affordable and home-grown energy and efficient consumption.

The Diversity Europe Group organised the **hybrid conference** on **'Climate Change and Energy Transition'**<sup>1</sup> on 2 March at the **Académie du Climat**<sup>2</sup>. The event addressed the multi-faceted and inter-related aspects of the topic, including the social and geo-political dimensions, the role of advertising and attitudes of citizens, as well as local, national and European actions.

**Séamus Boland**, president of the Diversity Europe Group, opened the conference by emphasising the urgency of efficient and immediate action on climate change and the energy transition, not least in the light of the United Nation's **IPCC report**<sup>3</sup> on climate change, which was published on the verge of the Group's conference. "Climate change and energy transition is a topic which is urgent and that concerns us all. Like peace, it is about our common future. It is about values and our humanity. And for that reason, we need to address it, even in these turbulent times," he said.

**Mr Boland** stressed the pivotal role of civil society in driving and maintaining the momentum on climate mitigation

and adaptation among communities and citizens. He highlighted that civil society organisations have the tenacity to "invest in, accelerate and embrace change with bottom-up initiatives, which respect the opinions and the rights of local people".

**Serge Orru**, president of the Académie du Climat's Advisory Council, explained that the Académie is dedicated to educating young people on developing an economy, which has the least possible impact on climate and the environment. "The multicultural Académie du Climat strives to raise awareness in order to support an energy and environmental transition that will provide a living planet for future generations."

The opening was followed by a keynote speech by **Emmanuelle Wargon**, Delegate Minister to the French Minister for Ecological Transition, in charge of housing. "The energy transition is at the heart of the fight against climate change," the Delegate Minister said and emphasised that work needed to be done at all levels. **Ms Wargon** admitted that the path to an energy and ecological transition was difficult and demanding. While the objectives and milestones were clear, solutions had to be put into place before additional constraints were imposed so that acceptability by citizens could be ensured. The involvement of individuals and communities, energy efficiency, the reduction of emissions and the deployment of renewable energy sources were some of the key aspects. The Delegate Minister spoke about initiatives of the French government and at EU level to that end.

Guest speaker **Claire Tutenuit**,



Emmanuelle Wargon and Séamus Boland

Director General of Entreprises pour l'Environnement (**EpE**<sup>4</sup> -Enterprises for the Environment), spoke about the role of advertising in changing people's perceptions of energy. "Our perception of happiness and a successful life is widely influenced, or even shaped, by advertising. The representation of people's attitude to energy use is therefore key to the ecological transition. This is why EpE has produced a list of stereotypes, often present in advertising, that encourage a continuation of the status-quo." **Ms Tutenuit** is convinced that changing advertisements will have an important impact on environmental perceptions.

**Assia Oulkadi**, Climate Expert of the **European Youth Forum**<sup>5</sup>, brought the perspective of European youth. She called for a systemic change and reminded participants that Europe's youth is urging policy-makers to address the issue of overconsumption fuelled by our growth-dependent economic system. "Overconsumption is the real reason causing our climate and biodiversity crises," **Ms Oulkadi** said.

Participants pointed to the need for climate justice with regard to five aspects: social, territorial, inter-state, between generations and also between species. Young people needed to be better involved in political decision-making.

1 EESC, conference on 'Climate Change and Energy Transition', <https://europa.eu/!C9WNxI>

2 Académie du Climat, <https://www.academieduclimat.paris/>

3 United Nations, IPCC report 2022, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/resources/press/press-release/>

4 Entreprises pour l'Environnement, <http://www.epe-asso.org/>

5 European Youth Forum, <https://www.youthforum.org/>

The conference also addressed geopolitical and military challenges in the context of climate and energy. **Jean-Michel Valantin**, Doctor in Strategic Studies and associate researcher at the [Read Team Analysis Society](#)<sup>1</sup>, said: "Today's global disorder is leading to massive geopolitical, strategic and military shifts." These changes could go hand in hand with the emergence of new conflicts, and give rise to both international and civil 'climate wars'.

The conference was organised in the context of the [French Presidency](#)<sup>2</sup> of the Council of the EU and the [Conference on the Future of Europe \(CoFoE\)](#)<sup>3</sup>. It brought together some 120 persons representing French civil society organisations, representatives of local and national authorities, academia and Member of the Diversity Europe Group.

The **conclusions and recommendations of the conference** are part of the



Group's contribution to the ongoing CoFoE. They are available on the [website of the event](#)<sup>4</sup> together will the presentations of all guest speakers and photos from the event.

- 1 Red Team Analysis Society, <https://redanalysis.org/fr/>
- 2 French Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/>
- 3 Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu/>
- 4 EESC, conference, conclusions and recommendations, <https://europa.eu/!4NY4k>

## Members of the Diversity Europe Group comment on the conference

**Dominique Gillot, Arnaud Schwartz and Thierry Libaert, all Members of the Diversity Europe Group, each chaired a panel of the Group's conference on 'Climate Change and Energy Transition'**<sup>5</sup> on 2 March 2022. In the following comments, they reflect on the main conclusions and recommendations of their respective panel or express their ideas and views.

### Panel I

Debates focused on the current state of climate change, energy scenarios and the role of advertising in changing people's perceptions of energy.

**Corrine Le Quéré**, president of the [French High Council on Climate](#)<sup>6</sup>, spoke about the latest development in climate change and made concrete proposals on how to progress on climate action. She said: "Climate actions set in motion in France and across Europe can expand and accelerate through clear signalling, long-term planning, secure financing, regular evaluation, and the integration of adaptation measures".

**Jean-Louis Bergey** of the French Agency for Ecological Transition ([Ademe](#))<sup>7</sup> presented the project called "Transition(s) 2050", for which he is project leader. Mr Bergey addressed energy scenarios, created to reach carbon neutrality. He explained: "this

forward-looking exercise by ADEME, presents 4 possibilities, which pose the sociological or technological bets to be made". Depending on various hypothesis, two of them were more or less voluntary regarding sobriety and another technology, while a last one looked rather like a "business as usual" scenario.

Guest speaker **Claire Tutenuit** of EpE ([Enterprises for the Environment](#))<sup>8</sup> spoke about the role of advertising and its responsibility in helping people transition towards a more sustainable way of life. "Our perception of happiness and a successful life is widely influenced, or even shaped, by advertising. The representation of people's attitude to energy use in adds is therefore key to the ecological transition" she said. Therefore, it is not only important to make consumers aware of stereotypes that encourage a continuation of the status-quo, but changes are also needed in the content of advertisement. Using



**Arnaud SCHWARTZ (FR)**  
President, France Nature Environnement

new ecofriendly stereotypes can help e.g. fighting toxic masculinity models that encourage climate-unfriendly attitudes, leading to overconsumptions and increased GHG emissions.

- 5 EESC, conference, <https://europa.eu/!C9WNxT>
- 6 Haut Conseil pour le Climat, <https://www.hautconseilclimat.fr/>
- 7 ADEME, <https://www.ademe.fr/>
- 8 Entreprises pour l'Environnement, <http://www.epe-asso.org/>

## Panel II

Panel 2 highlighted the social aspects of climate change, particularly in terms of inequalities. In order to take these aspects into account, consideration must be given to the five aspects of climate justice: social, territorial, international, inter-generational and also inter-species.

There can be no effective campaign against climate change without the active participation of young people: as the first to be affected, they must be involved in the decision-making.

In order to move from intention to action, psychological barriers must be removed, particularly those created by the role of advertising. Following upon the contribution of members of the French advertising industry, and in line with the [opinion](#)<sup>1</sup> recently adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee on the role of advertising in the green transition, it is proposed that work should be undertaken on improving all advertising materials that could impact upon our environmental awareness.

1 EESC opinion INT/948, <https://europa.eu/!8TuGvM>



**Thierry LIBAERT (FR)**  
Spokesperson, EESC Environment and Consumers Category  
Representative, Foundation for Nature and Mankind NGO  
Research Associate, Catholic University of Leuven

## Panel III

### The ecological transition of our economies will be fair and equitable or it will not be

Since 1988, the diagnosis established by the scientific community gathered within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC<sup>2</sup>) has been refined, and its forecasts confirmed by facts and observations. The conclusions of the experts are irrefutable: the latest preliminary [report](#)<sup>3</sup> from this organisation confirms what had already been underlined in August 2021, namely that the temperature of the planet will increase by 1.5°C by 2030, ten years earlier than the previous forecast had predicted.

There can no longer be any doubt: our planet is literally burning down before our eyes. To paraphrase President Chirac at the 1992 Rio summit, we must no longer look elsewhere; or, drawing on the title of a recent hit film: we have to look up.

However, those who imagine that the bill can still and always will be footed by the poorest among us are mistaken: the world's richest 1% emit twice the volume of greenhouse gases as the poorest half of humanity.

As Jean Jaurès said, "courage is about aiming for the ideal and understanding the real".

So let's be collectively courageous and firstly understand reality: the essential



**Dominique GILLOT (FR)**  
General Federation of Children in Care in Public Education (FG PEP)  
National Consultative Council of People with Disabilities (CNCPH)

ecological transition of our economies will be fair and equitable or it simply will not be; the social acceptability of this transition is a condition for its success.

2 United Nations, IPCC, <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

3 United Nations, IPCC report 2022, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/resources/press/press-release/>

## Associational Life Category discusses pro-democratic narratives, EU funding and an EU Youth Test

On 17 February, the [Associational Life Category](#)<sup>4</sup> held its first meeting of the year. This enabled Category Members to express their views on three different topics relevant to their work:

The first panel, chaired by the spokesperson **Andris Gobiņš**, addressed the question of how to create narratives which positively promote pro-democratic values. Members listened to a presentation of the project "[Listen to Europe – Reaching Beyond Our Base Audiences](#)<sup>5</sup>" by **Petros Fassoulas**, secretary-general of European Movement International, and discussed how associations could reach out to those living outside their "bubble".

The second panel focused on current practices and recommendations for involving associations in setting priorities for investments and on funds available for associations. Contributions were made by **Artur Mundil**, policy officer at the European Commission, **Javier Doz Orrit**, president of the EESC's European Semester Group, **Alexandrina Najmowicz**, secretary-general of the European Civic Forum and **Karolina Dreszer**, president of the National Federation of Polish NGOs. The session was moderated by Category Member **Ionuț Sibian**.

The EESC's contribution to the [European Year of Youth](#)<sup>6</sup> and the proposed EU

Youth Test were the central topics of the afternoon debate, chaired by Member **Michael McLoughlin**. Together with **Kristóf Papp**, policy officer at the European Youth Forum, the Category discussed amongst other things the content of an EU Youth Test, an impact assessment tool to measure the effects of EU policy on young people.

The next meeting of the Associational Life Category will take place on 17 June 2022.

4 EESC, Associational Life Category, <https://europa.eu/!VD38XB>

5 Listen to Europe, <https://listento-europe.info/>

6 European Union, European Year of Youth 2022, [https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en)

# MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Margrethe Vestager and Alain Coheur

On 4 March 2022, the EESC and the European Commission hosted a conference on '**A sustainable future for European industry**<sup>1</sup>'. Our Member and EESC **INT section**<sup>2</sup> president Alain Coheur welcomed Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice- resident of the European Commission in charge of A Europe Fit for the Digital Age, to the closing session of the conference. Read more: <https://europa.eu/!36ftbx>



Alain Coheur and Guy Verhofstadt

On 10 March 2022, Mr Coheur chaired the event '**Social economy, the future of Europe - Which contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe?**<sup>2</sup>' organised by the EESC in partnership with the French Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Parliament. Following the event, Mr Coheur had a short exchange with guest speaker MEP Guy Verhofstadt.

- 1 EESC, Conference on 'A sustainable future for European industry', <https://europa.eu/!YwHgN4>
- 2 EESC, Section for Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT), <https://europa.eu/!pK46ky>
- 3 EESC, event 'Social economy, the future of Europe', <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/social-economy-future-europe>

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

## European Commission Vice-President participates in the EESC plenary debate

In February, the EESC held a plenary debate on "**The impact of COVID-19 on fundamental rights and the rule of law across the EU and the future of democracy**", which was attended by **Věra Jourová**, European Commission Vice-President for values and transparency. The debate was linked to the EESC opinion **SOC/691**<sup>4</sup> on the same topic. The key takeaway was: the extraordinary measures taken to fight the pandemic should not endanger the EU's founding principles of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.



**Ms Jourová** explained that the European Commission had been proactively monitoring the situation and would continue to closely monitor the impact of emergency measures: "the Commission has insisted from the outset that emergency measures should be limited to what is necessary, strictly proportionate, and clearly time limited. They should also be in line with national constitutional guarantees, and comply with the relevant European and international standards".

Presenting the EESC opinion SOC/691, **Cristian Pirvulescu**, Diversity Europe Group Member and one of the rapporteurs for the opinion, called for an inclusive recovery process leaving no one behind, and giving particular

support to vulnerable sections of society, while fostering participation, democracy and the implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**<sup>5</sup>.

Various other Members of the Group took the floor in the discussion. Diversity Europe Group president **Séamus Boland** said that while addressing the health situation and strengthening the resilience of European health systems remained a priority, it is crucial to strengthen civil rights and to stand behind civil society organisations (CSOs). The latter had seen their possibilities to act limited by the extraordinary measures. Mr Boland stressed the role of CSOs in a context marked by an authoritarian shift and democratic backsliding: "CSOs continue to contribute to and to promote European values. They are often the democratic bulwark against authoritarianism".

**Ionuț Sibian** said: "we need to capitalize on national civic infrastructure and expertise and avoid putting more pressure on them. This is why I believe that the Commission must reconsider the current requirement of co-funding under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (**CERV**)<sup>6</sup>".

Vice-president **Jan Dirx** warned how the undemocratic political space is constantly increasing in the EU. He urged the EU institutions to use "every possible means to appeal to democracy and the rule of law in Member States, as in several countries the pandemic was used as a false excuse to restrict freedoms".

4 EESC opinion SOC/691, <https://europa.eu/!G6PnW9>

5 European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, <https://europa.eu/!uV48pD>

6 European Commission, CERV, <https://europa.eu/!Cj9xcy>



**Dovilė Juodkaitė** drew attention to the particular deprivation of individual rights suffered by the most

vulnerable groups in some Member States during the pandemic, namely women, children and older people. Ms Juodkaitė particularly praised the CSOs' monitoring role, which ensured that large-scale human rights violations were avoided.

**Elena Calistru** called for more action to protect and defend democracy and the rule of law and warned against the consequences of inaction. "Every

time we are silent or fail to punish an aggression, a journalist's right to access information is restricted, or an activist' protection is not guaranteed, we only achieve less freedom".

A video recording of the plenary debate is available at: <https://fb.watch/bJmxol-KI/>

## After COVID-19, a new Marshall Plan for the tourism industry is needed



**How can we create a more resilient, innovative and sustainable tourism industry?** This question took centre stage during one of the debates at the February plenary session. The debate was linked to the EESC opinion [INT/949<sup>1</sup>](#) on how to rebuild **Tourism and Transport in Europe after the pandemic**. The rapporteur for this opinion was Diversity Europe Group Member **Panagiotis Gkofas**.

Several guest speakers attended the debate, representing EUROCHAMBRES, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Italian General Confederation of Enterprises, Professions and Self-Employment (Confcommercio-Imprese per l'Italia) and the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions. Claudia Monteiro De Aguiar, Member of the European Parliament and rapporteur on the topic "Establishing an EU strategy for sustainable tourism", also joined the debate, to which several Diversity

Europe Group Members contributed. Presenting the own-initiative opinion INT/949, **Mr Gkofas** stressed: "we need a new Marshall Plan to help Europe's tourism industry survive – to save our companies and our staff". Mr Gkofas explained that the opinion included a series of key short-, medium- and long-term measures to see the industry through the crisis. One of these was to make SMEs in the hotel, restaurant and catering sectors a priority in the **National Recovery and Resilience Plans<sup>2</sup>**.



**Séamus Boland**, Diversity Europe Group president, underlined the strong dependence of the EU economy on tourism. The sector contributes 10% of EU GDP and is responsible for 6% of employment. Mr Boland reminded EESC Members of the enormous disruption to the tourism sector

caused by COVID-19. He stressed the need to rethink both the tourism and the transport sector, while promoting greater resilience in line with the green transition.

**Ileana Izverniceanu De La Iglesia** drew attention to the impact suffered by consumers and clients in the tourism sector. She therefore called for a stronger, more resilient and consumer-centred tourism sector.

**Martin Salamon** confirmed the drop in consumer confidence. He explained: "many consumers have lost money and have not been able to recover it". The enforcement and strengthening of consumers' rights would be the most effective path for the recovery of the sector.

During the discussion, **João Diogo de Castro Nabais dos Santos** developed four proposals for working towards more resilient and sustainable tourism, namely: green tourism destinations and services, investments in the digital empowerment of tourism networks and facilities, changes in the regulatory framework and new approaches concerning the tax environment.

**Juraj Sipko** pointed out that impact of COVID-19 especially affected SMEs in the tourism sector, which policy measures needed to take into account.

The full debate can be watched at: <https://fb.watch/bJkNgDfT/>

1 EESC opinion INT/949, <https://europa.eu/!WwMTVm>

2 European Commission, National Resilience and Recovery Plans, <https://europa.eu/!wYRgqt>

## Ukraine: Diversity Europe Group Members express their solidarity and call for firm actions

In a spontaneous debate initiated by the EESC President, Christa Schweng, during the February plenary session, the EESC Members condemned the unjustified and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. EESC Members expressed their solidarity with the Ukrainian people and called for firm actions at both EU and national level in a spirit of unity during this dramatic time. Several Diversity Europe Group Members took the floor during the debate.

Diversity Europe Group president **Séamus Boland** asked EESC Members to reach out to organised civil society in Ukraine with meaningful actions. Europe needs to be united. Mr Boland asked EESC Members to speak out strongly against aggression and in favour of the freedom and equality that Europe has stood for after WWII.

**Luca Jahier** stressed the need to look for ways to stop the war, to stay united and to get ready to pay the price for defending the EU's freedoms.

**Elena Calistru** said that the attack was not only an attack on Ukraine, but on "all of us, who believe in democracy and individual freedoms". She also called for support for journalists and the countries that will receive refugees and said: "It is also essential to put pressure on the European Commission and the European Parliament to allocate resources to counter

disinformation and fight propaganda".

**Elena Sinkeviciute** said that European civil society had the opportunity to take the lead in helping Ukraine. She hoped that the next EESC plenary could address how to rebuild Ukrainian civil society.

**Christian Moos** suggested strengthening the western alliance, which in his view is "the only guarantor of our freedom".

**Lidija Pavić-Rogošić** said: "We must try to bring this war to an end". The Croatian war started in a similar way and in Croatia people still suffered its consequences three decades later. Organised civil society should provide humanitarian assistance to refugees.

**Simo Tiainen** stressed that however difficult it may be, it is important to try to support not only the other EU institutions, Ukraine and its organised civil society, but also Russian people, civil society, and opposition. Russia will remain a neighbour, now and in the future.

**Andris Gobiņš** suggested five actions to react to Russia's aggression, including the setting up of a civil society fund for refugees and those organisations staying in Ukraine and



"sending Ukraine a clear invitation to become an EU and eventually even a NATO member state".

**Athanasios Ioannidis** said that the EESC should strongly condemn the military attack and all revisionary actions. "Europe must change its policies regarding energy efficiency and must not support countries having a revisionary behaviour anymore."

**Ákos Topolánszky** expressed his solidarity with Ukrainian families, asking everyone to defend and represent democracy and the rule of law.

**Tudorel Tupiluși** asked Members stand by Ukrainian people, especially the most vulnerable groups. In his view, the announced measures would not be enough to stop Putin from carrying on the aggression. "We need to be harsher," he said.

The full debate can be watched at: <https://europa.eu/C6XXpV>

## OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 23 and 24 February 2022. The EESC plenary adopted 18 opinions, 11 of which were drafted by Members of the Diversity Europe Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

**Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY)**, rapporteur, **NAT/842**<sup>1</sup> Waste shipments – revision of EU rules

**Andris GOBIŅŠ (LV)**, rapporteur, **SOC/713**<sup>2</sup> Reinforcing democracy and integrity of elections package

**Cillian LOHAN (IE)**, rapporteur, **NAT/843**<sup>3</sup> 'Fit for 55': delivering the EU's 2030 Climate Target on the way to climate neutrality

1 EESC opinion NAT/842, <https://europa.eu/138XNkw>

2 EESC opinion SOC/713, <https://europa.eu/19RDWCr>

3 EESC opinion NAT/843, <https://europa.eu/1UbjcWb>

**Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO)**, co-rapporteur, **SOC/691**<sup>1</sup> The impact of COVID-19 on fundamental rights and the rule of law across the EU and the future of democracy

**Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL)**, rapporteur, **SOC/702**<sup>2</sup> HERA

**Lutz RIBBE (DE)**, rapporteur, **TEN/761**<sup>3</sup> Energy prices

**Małgorzata Anna BOGUSZ (PL)**, co-rapporteur, **INT/967**<sup>4</sup> European missions

**Martin SCHAFFENRATH (AT)**, rapporteur-general, **INT/975**<sup>5</sup> Medicinal products for human and investigational use/derogation

**Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL)**, co-rapporteur, **INT/962**<sup>6</sup> A Pact for R&I in Europe

**Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL)**, rapporteur, **INT/949**<sup>7</sup> Tourism and transport / Follow-up

**Rudolf KOLBE (AT)**, co-rapporteur, **TEN/757**<sup>8</sup> New European Bauhaus

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's [website](#)<sup>9</sup>.

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on **18 and 19 May 2022**. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#)<sup>10</sup>.

A list including all **new work appointments** of Diversity Europe Group Members is available on the Committee's [website](#)<sup>11</sup>.

1 EESC opinion SOC/691, <https://europa.eu/!G6PnW9>

2 EESC opinion SOC/702, <https://europa.eu/!M8kpKQ>

3 EESC opinion TEN/761, <https://europa.eu/!RYjJlQ>

4 EESC opinion INT/967, <https://europa.eu/!JkXJNr>

5 EESC opinion INT/975, <https://europa.eu/!cGfcpn>

6 EESC opinion INT/962, <https://europa.eu/!ynPH4j>

7 EESC opinion INT/949, <https://europa.eu/!WvMTVvm>

8 EESC opinion TEN/757, <https://europa.eu/!YV6Bb7>

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

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

11 EESC, New work appointments – February 2022, <https://europa.eu/!36vGMg>

## What is EESC opinion NAT/821 all about?



**Andreas THURNER (AT)**  
Head, EU and International Relations Unit, Austrian Chamber of Agriculture

**An interview with the rapporteur for the EESC own-initiative opinion NAT/821 on “Aligning food business strategies and operations with the SDGs for a sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery”**

### What are the three main findings of this opinion?

Our food systems have a substantial impact on climate and the environment. Therefore, food business operators have a crucial role to play if we want to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs<sup>12</sup>). In the opinion, we acknowledge that food businesses across the supply chain are already working to make progress on sustainability and to offer consumers healthy and sustainable products. Nevertheless, to get on track to achieve the SDGs, more needs to be done. The opinion identifies for example the reduction of food

losses and food waste, sustainable sourcing, improved packaging and logistics systems, circular and resource-efficient food chains, as well as bioeconomy solutions, as effective entry points towards greater sustainability.

### How can these issues be addressed? What are your three main recommendations?

Policy makers should establish an enabling environment, in particular for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), to support and facilitate stronger engagement with the SDG agenda. While larger companies often have their own sustainability departments in place, it seems that SMEs often have limited resources and capacities to embed sustainability in their businesses. Business operators nowadays often experience sustainability requirements as complex and burdensome, rather than as an opportunity. The EESC therefore recommends developing more easily understandable language (a “Grammar for Sustainability”) to change this. We also looked into the recently developed voluntary EU code of conduct on responsible business and marketing practices and identified some areas to strengthen this approach. Overall, greater involvement by civil society and social dialogue will be crucial for success.

### After the adoption of the opinion, what have you done to promote the opinion and to make civil society’s voice heard?

During the drafting phase of this own initiative opinion, we established close contacts with representatives of the European Commission. These contacts are continuing, as the European Commission has already started working on a “Sustainable Food Systems Framework Initiative”.

### What are the next steps?

We will also continue the work in the EESC, in particular within the [Thematic Study Group on Sustainable Food Systems](#)<sup>13</sup>. We will follow up with another own-initiative opinion on [“Towards a sustainable food labelling framework to empower consumers to make sustainable food choices”](#)<sup>14</sup>.

Find out more about the EESC opinion NAT/821 on “Aligning food business strategies and operations with the SDGs for a sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery” at: <https://europa.eu/!Xc3Vb4>

12 United Nations, SDGs, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

13 EESC, Thematic Study Group on Sustainable Food Systems, <https://europa.eu/!yXyRgD>

14 UEESC opinion NAT/857, <https://europa.eu/!Mkj3nG>

# UPCOMING EVENTS

10/05/2022 – Day of the Liberal Professions

The EESC, the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions, COPA-COGECA and IFOAM Organics Europe have launched together the first ever **EU organic awards**<sup>1</sup>. These awards will recognise excellence along the organic value chain, rewarding the best and most innovative actors in organic production in the EU. Applications will be open from 25 March until 8 June 2022. For more information, visit the website of the European Commission at: <https://europa.eu/JhF8PW>



<sup>1</sup> EESC, EU organic awards, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/launch-first-eu-organic-awards>

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