



European Economic
and Social Committee
Association of Former Members

Connect

The newsletter of the Association of Former Members of the EESC

1

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**Biannual review may contain
certain anachronisms.**



Editorial by the AFM President

The mid-term renewal of the EESC took place at the April 2023 plenary session. At the kind invitation of Oliver Röpke, I attended the meeting alongside the other former EESC presidents who were able to come.

Christa Schweng served as President under difficult conditions and circumstances, notably due to COVID-19. She showed great moral and physical courage.

Fortunately, she was able to count on the dedication of her team, on the support of the presidents of the three groups, Stefano MALLIA, Oliver RÖPKE and Séamus BOLAND, and of that of the secretary-general, Gianluca BRUNETTI, who was already well-established in his role.

Thank you, dear Christa, for your excellent work and for our excellent cooperation since I was elected president of the Association of Former Members of the EESC.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all those who have been elected to EESC leadership roles: the two vice-presidents, Laurentiu PLOSCEANU and Krzysztof PATER; the presidents of the six sections Cinzia DEL RIO (ECO), Dimitris DIMITRIADIS (REX), Baiba MILTOVIČĀ (TEN), Sandra PARTHIE (INT), Peter SCHMIDT (NAT), Yannis VARDAKASTANIS (ECO); and CCMI President Pietro-Francesco DE LOTTO.

Having elected Gaby BISCHOFF as president in 2015 – who is currently doing excellent work at the European Parliament – the Workers' Group has once again elected a female president: my colleague, Lucie STUDNČNÁ.

Dear Lucia, I would like to express my warmest congratulations and wish you much strength and courage in our struggle to defend the rights of all citizens, especially salaried workers.

Any democratic system worthy of the name must, among other things, guarantee respect for freedom of expression and fundamental social rights. It must also promote and fund social

dialogue and civil dialogue, not only when social organisations give their blessing to the decisions taken by political authorities, but also, and most importantly, when they are critical and intervene before decisions that matter to citizens are taken.

We are lucky to live in this corner of the world where, more than 70 years ago, just five years after the end of the devastating Second World War, a handful of German, Belgian, French, Dutch, Italian and Luxembourgish politicians came together to create an area of peace, freedom and democracy. This area has grown over time. Slowly but surely. Qualitatively and quantitatively.

However, in recent years, “when we look around us, we see that freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law are under attack. Russia’s brutal war of aggression against Ukraine; the rise of authoritarianism and the decline of democratic rule; the ongoing efforts to destabilise entire nations and to spread disinformation: these are just some of the developments that demand our full attention and our action”.

These were the remarks made by the new President of the European Economic and Social Committee, Oliver Röpke, at his inauguration speech on 26 April 2023. He is correct, just as he is correct to want to act with – and on behalf of – all the components of the EESC to defend democracy, fundamental rights, human rights, freedom of expression, freedom of association and peaceful assembly and rules-based international cooperation.

Your programme, dear Oliver, is ambitious and courageous. You can certainly count on me and, if I may say so, all former EESC members will also be with you throughout your term of office as president.

Georges DASSIS, AFM PRESIDENT



I feel honoured and proud to be addressing our former EESC members as the new President of the Committee. Remembering the immense work done by our former members, as experts both in their fields and in the Committee's activities, I am aware of the huge responsibility that rests with me. You are the voice of organised civil society, which is a fundamental aspect of our democracies. One that is sometimes overlooked, but which was clearly identified as indispensable by European citizens during the Conference on the Future of Europe.

I am inspired by your commitment to shape European policies that promote freedom, equal opportunities and social justice, among many other things. Your work has been invaluable in protecting human and workers' rights, promoting gender equality and combating discrimination and exclusion in all its forms.

This is especially important nowadays, as hard-pressing matters – be it the post-COVID recovery or Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine – can overshadow these important issues. We must never forget that fundamental values are the core pillar of the European project. Together with our members, former and current, we must be vigilant in ensuring that those hard-fought values are always protected. My [political manifesto](#) underscores the significance of these principles. It also charts a path forward to a more resilient,

more inclusive and more democratic EU that will inspire our neighbours near and far.

At the heart of my vision is the belief that civil society organisations are the bedrock of our democracies. The Committee is the vital link between citizens and decision-makers, channelling their concerns and aspirations into policies for a better future for Europe. I am committed to ensuring that those voices are heard at the highest levels of the European institutions. Those voices will become so much more important with the European elections coming up in 2024. I want the EESC to take on a more active role ahead of the elections to engage with voters and increase their participation. Your knowledge and experience would be an invaluable asset in this regard.

I also believe that the EESC has to take on a more active role and engage with civil society in countries like Ukraine that are fighting for our fundamental values and greatly need our support today. The future of the European Union is deeply intertwined with the stability and prosperity of countries in our neighbourhood, and we must recognise it. We must also learn from lessons of the past and better prepare the EU membership of candidate countries. I believe it is crucial to open the doors of the EESC to our neighbours in the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans. By acting as a true civil society gateway for these countries, I want the EESC to support and empower them to fight for freedom, democracy and closer integration.

You have built the foundations of the Committee as we know it today. Throughout your tenure, you have exemplified the highest standards of professionalism, commitment and passion. As we move forward, I wanted to emphasise that your expertise and insights are highly valued and needed. The challenges we face today are unprecedented but I am convinced that together we can strive for an even stronger European Economic and Social Committee, united in our pursuit of a more just, equitable and sustainable Europe.

Oliver Röpke, *EESC President*



As the EESC's Secretary-general, it is my chief role to implement decisions made by the Committee's plenary assembly, Bureau and president. To achieve this, I manage the institution's administration and budget so as to assist members in the best possible way in carrying out their duties.

As an EU citizen and civil servant, it is my firm belief that the EU is about building bridges and breaking down barriers. Every day, the EESC demonstrates the outstanding role it plays as a bridge between European civil society and the EU institutions. In this regard, I would like to share with you some success stories from the past year which I am particularly proud of and which show how the administration operates relentlessly to strengthen the tools at the disposal of the political authority.

Firstly, thanks to constructive collaboration between members and staff, the EESC has modernised itself into a more agile, more robust and more future-proof European institution that is in sync with the EU's objective of enhancing participatory democracy in a resource-efficient manner.

Interinstitutional collaboration

The EESC always strives to increase its outreach, among other things by strengthening its relations with the other EU institutions and bodies. Notably, at administrative level, it has a very close relationship with the European Committee of the Regions, with which it shares both buildings and staff.

A new cooperation agreement between the two committees was signed in October 2021 for a duration of five years and two months, with the purpose of reinforcing the existing

administrative cooperation in numerous ways. The practical terms for implementation of this new agreement were approved by the EESC Bureau in May 2022 and by the CoR Bureau in June 2022.

This comprised a new organisational chart, launched in October 2022, including:

- a new Directorate for Innovation and Information Technology (IIT);
- a centralised Public Procurement and Financial Management Unit (MPGF), directly under the authority of the secretaries-general;
- the transfer of reception and paper distribution activities from the committees' own services to the Joint Services (Directorate for Logistics).

Through this cooperation agreement, the two committees continue to strengthen their synergies through close collaboration between services, for instance in the fields of human resources, communication and meeting room services.

Discharge

Over the years, the budgetary control authorities have always recognised the sound management of our budget. In relations with the European Parliament, 2023 also marks a positive moment in terms of the EESC's review on the implementation of the EU budget. Indeed, on 28 February 2023 the European Parliament CONT members proposed granting discharge to the EESC for the 2021 budget, confirming that the EESC used its budget in accordance with the principle of sound financial management, namely in line with the principles of "economy", "efficiency" and "effectiveness".

After recent difficult years, the EESC has managed to regain the trust of its European partners, thanks to joint efforts from members and staff.

Allowances

In March 2023, after relentless efforts from the EESC members and administration, the Council agreed to grant a structural allowance for remote attendance to members for EESC meetings. The allowance – set at EUR 145 – will be payable for attendance at all meetings except Bureau meetings, plenary meetings and section/CCMI meetings.

Transparency

As of June 2023, the EESC will participate in the EU Transparency Register, joining the EU's efforts in transparency. The Transparency Register is a database that lists organisations that try to influence the law-making and policy implementation process of the EU institutions.

Although the EESC's consultative role within the EU, which enables European civil society to participate in the EU decision-making process, already enhances the transparency of EU law-making, the EESC has adopted a set of transparency measures showing the Committee's commitment to ensuring that its decisions are as transparent as possible.

Building strategy

As regards buildings, the EESC has been at cruising speed since 2022. One of the main objectives of the joint strategy of both Committees was to ensure that their buildings were grouped together geographically by exchanging the B68/TRE buildings for the VMA building. This was achieved in September 2022.

In the medium term, the buildings strategy will have to be further adapted to take into account both the new constraints and the opportunities created by the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the working environment and culture.

Renovation work

In order to improve the working conditions of its members, who produce the EESC's political output, the Joint Services' Directorate for Logistics (DL) carried out renovation work on the third to ninth floors of the VMA building in 2022 and 2023, turning the 37-year-old building into a much more efficient, comfortable and green building.

As a result of the work, the EESC area dedicated to its members (third and fourth floors) increased by 130 m² (16%), with a total of 102 workstations. It also includes numerous improvements to members' working conditions compared to before the renovation.

Passageway

In an additional effort to facilitate contact between EESC members and the European Parliament, a new passageway between the Committee and the European Parliament buildings was inaugurated in November 2022. This passageway is on the fifth floor of the BvS building. The badge security systems have also been aligned, allowing EESC officials and members to enter the European Parliament without screening.

Conclusion

These are just a few examples of recent accomplishments which help the EESC perform its consultative obligations. Because the EESC is constantly taking action, through its increased involvement in the Green Deal, its desire to meet the continuous and increasing geopolitical challenges related to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and the focus on efficiently promoting and supporting participatory democracy, it is continuously looking for new ways to present the points of view of EU citizens to EU lawmakers.

It is my view that, as a chamber for debating and for drawing up opinions, our Committee has a unique way of strengthening the democratic credentials of the process of building the European Union.

Gianluca Brunetti

EESC Secretary-general

Together for a competitive and prosperous Europe



Dear colleagues,

It was a pleasure to meet you at the AFM's General Assembly on 28 March and to hear your views on the trajectory of the EESC.

The last few years have been tumultuous for Europe, for the whole world and equally for our business community. While Europe's economy was still struggling with the recovery from the covid crisis, Russia's brutal and unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine has led Europe to rethink its place in the world and fuelled an energy crisis that increased energy prices by over a third in 2022¹. All these strains on our economy led to the highest number of bankruptcy declarations among EU businesses since the start of data collection in 2015², while the EU's global competition is rapidly getting stronger.

For us as the EESC Employers' Group it is crystal clear that Europe's future success and the wellbeing of all of its citizens will be highly dependent on the competitiveness of its businesses.

Over the past few years, the EESC Employers' Group has consistently advocated for a more strategic approach to competitiveness, proposing the idea of a "competitiveness check" and an overarching competitiveness agenda for Europe. Recently, we have seen a shift in focus as the EU once again starts to give importance to the competitiveness of its economy and businesses, which was also marked by the introduction of a competitiveness check in all EU policy and legislative proposals. Now it is time to work on implementing it and make sure that it will be more than a tick-the-box exercise.

1. 35.2% in 2022 in the EU.

2. The number of bankruptcy declarations among EU businesses increased substantially in the fourth quarter of 2022 (+26.8% compared with the previous quarter) and reached the highest levels since the start of the data collection in 2015. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20220217-2>.

Our recently adopted Group Priorities, titled [Driving Prosperity for All: A Competitiveness Agenda for the EU](#), reflect our unwavering commitment to a strong, open, and competitive Europe that will put us in a position to take care of all citizens. In particular, in our priorities we call on policymakers to focus on the following essentials:

- **Competitive access to resources:** Energy, raw materials, labour, capital and data must be available under competitive conditions for businesses to thrive.
- **Open markets with equal rules:** Businesses of all sizes, sectors and locations need access to markets with a level playing field in the EU and globally.
- **Business friendly regulation and taxation:** A policy framework that supports entrepreneurship and innovation, investment and trade is necessary, including regulation, taxation and allocation of public funding.

Dear friends,

The AFM combines an incredible amount of experience and know-how. To fulfil the mission of the EESC as the custodian of the interests of civil society, our regular exchanges are important opportunities to reflect on our work. Together, I am convinced that the EESC can strongly contribute to a competitive and prosperous Europe through which we can really aspire to leave no one behind.

Stefano Mallia

President of the EESC Employers' Group

Discussing the Group's priorities with former members in the light of the ongoing war



When the former members of the EESC met in March earlier this year, there was the usual catching up with old friends. There were of course the reminiscences and the sharing of stories, which always manage to improve with time. So I was extremely happy to accept an invitation to speak at the meeting from my old friend George Dassis, current president of the former members' association and of course a former president of the EESC. I enjoy these meetings, especially because I have the honour of being among people who – because of their EESC membership and in many cases further engagement – contribute to improving the lives of people affected by various disadvantages. While the temptation might have been to dwell on times past, there was a clear desire at the meeting to understand the current crisis in Europe, mainly originating from the war in Ukraine.

The crisis, which clearly affects European countries in different ways, has now moved into a phase that is likely to last a lot longer than earlier predictions. With no sign of any immediate peace initiative, it looks like this period will last a number of years. For Europe, this means the complete re-organisation of all its trading

activities. It also challenges the EU countries to ensure that the EU is fully prepared to manage the many internal and external pressures that could bring about its end.

I was happy to see that there was a strong welcome for the priorities of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group for 2023 and the remainder of the current term-of-office of the Committee (until October 2025), which I presented at the meeting. Priorities that highlight the reality of cost-of-living increases, the need for strong protection of democratic values based on justice and equality and the urgent need to manage the climate change crisis, which will inevitably have huge consequences for future generations.

I enjoyed the fruitful discussions with the former members of our Committee and hope to continue my learning by listening to them on future occasions.

Séamus Boland

President of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group

Cooperation agreement updated in 2023 between the EESC and the AFM

1. The Association of Former Members of the European Economic and Social Committee is a non-profit association whose purpose is to preserve the European spirit that motivated the members of the EESC during their term in office and to use this to help promote the image of the EESC as the assembly that represents civil society organisations.

The AFM holds an annual general assembly in Brussels and organises one meeting a year elsewhere, either on a specific theme or place.
2. The EESC and the AFM agree the following:
 - 2.1 The EESC grants the AFM an annual subsidy. As of January 2010, 2017, 2023 this subsidy shall amount to EUR 25,000, 35 000, 45 000 per annum, subject to budgetary approval by the EESC Bureau.
 - 2.2 This subsidy may be used, amongst other things, to cover the following organisational costs:
 - a) general assembly:
 - travel expenses subject to the conditions set out in Article 2.3.;
 - interpreting costs;
 - cost of one evening meal (for participant and spouse);
 - b) annual meeting outside Brussels:
 - cost of one evening meal (for participant and spouse);
 - interpretation costs (if necessary);
 - coach rental;
 - c) organisation of extraordinary AFM bureau meetings;
 - d) other travel expenses:
 - travel expenses subject to the conditions set out in Article 2.4.
 - 2.3 Travel expenses for AFM members attending the general assembly are covered subject to the following conditions:
 - air fares are reimbursed at the rate of the cheapest possible ticket (APEX) to a maximum of EUR 600, 400, 450 (e.g. for Rhodes or the Canary Islands) on presentation of the relevant airline ticket and boarding card. Any expenditure in excess of the ceiling must be the subject of a written justification and shall be submitted to the AFM president for approval;
 - train fares are reimbursed at the rate of a second-class train ticket, on presentation of the train ticket, to a maximum of EUR 450;
 - car expenses are reimbursed at a rate of EUR 0.22 0.50 per kilometre, in line with the current rate established by the Bureau in September 2004 up to a limit of EUR 450;
 - AFM members attending must sign the attendance list.
 - 2.4 If, after the costs mentioned in Articles 2.2.a) and 2.2.b) have been covered, the budget still allows for additional expenses, AFM members shall be entitled to apply for the reimbursement of travel expenses for attending meetings, seminars, congresses etc. organised by the EESC outside the framework of its regular meetings (study groups and section meetings) and plenary sessions.
 - 2.4.1 Members applying for such reimbursement shall justify their interest in the meeting's subject or theme based on their present or former professional occupation and shall confirm that they are not entitled to reimbursement by their organisation or institution.

2.4.2 Reimbursement shall be carried out by the president of the AFM after consulting the secretariat. Members shall only be entitled to one reimbursement per financial year under this article. Authorisation of requests to participate in the events referred to in Article 2.4 above shall be granted on a “first come, first served” basis. The president’s decision in this respect is binding and not subject to appeal. The president shall ensure an even distribution of these reimbursements based on the AFM members’ former EESC group membership.

Conditions applying to reimbursement under this article are identical to those mentioned in Article 2.3.

2.5 At the end of each financial year, before renewal of the subsidy, the AFM must inform the EESC of its financial situation (balance sheet and profit and loss account), and provide written proof of all expenditure covered by the EESC subsidy.

The portion of the subsidy not used for expenses defined under Article 2.2 above and within the limits and conditions set out in this article shall be returned to the EESC by the AFM six months after the end of the financial year at the latest.

2.6 The AFM must also provide the EESC with:

- a report evaluating its purpose and value added;
- an annual report on its activities;
- an annual updated list of AFM members.

3. This agreement shall be evaluated by the EESC and the AFM after an initial period of two years.

4. This Agreement was approved by the General Assembly of the AFM on 9 March 2009.

Consolidated version of the rules in force on ~~8 March 2010; 13 December 2016;~~ [25 April 2023](#), drawn up by the EESC secretariat. This text combines the initial document adopted by the Bureau on 11 January 2001 with the amendments approved by decision of the same body on 14 December 2004, and on 16 February 2010, and on 13 December 2016 and on [25 April 2023](#).

General assembly on 27 and 28 March 2023

This year, the Bureau proposed organising the meeting differently: holding the General Assembly over two half-days, Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning, to allow all the members present to attend the informal dinner on Monday evening.

90 members were present at the General Assembly.

The president opened the meeting with a minute's silence in memory of the members who had passed away: Mr Carmelo Cedrone, Mr Francis John Whitworth and Mr Pierre Boulnois.

He then welcomed the new members, Mr Adam Rogalewski, Ms Gabriele Müller-List and Mr Jarosław Mulewicz. The Association currently had 287 former members who were up to date with their membership fees.

The President went on to present the activity report for 2022.

First of all, he thanked the secretary-general for agreeing to provide, at his request, a magnetic access pass to all the members of the Association that were up to date with their membership fees. It would now be possible to access all the Committee's buildings without the need to bother a member of staff; up to that point, staff members had had to go down to the reception area to let members enter the building.

He then thanked the president, Ms Christa Schweng, and the presidents of the three groups for their availability, as well as the EESC Bureau for increasing the Association's budget.

He informed the meeting that Mr Filip Hamro-Drotz had resigned as vice-president/treasurer. Mr Hamro-Drotz remained a member of the bureau, but it would now be Ms Laure Batut who would take on the role as treasurer.

The Association had had to change its bank account because of the inflexibility of the bank, which had refused to change the account holder from our former president, Mr Roger Briesch, without him being there in person at the bank. Since Mr Briesch was unable to travel to Brussels at present, it had been necessary to open a new account to manage the Association's funds from now on.

Two issues of Connect had allowed all the members who so wished to express an opinion on matters of their choice, thus enabling them to maintain a link with members who could not be present at the General Assembly.

The 2022 study trip, ably organised by Mr Luis-Miguel Pariza, assisted by Ms Maria Cossu, Ms Calina Berar and Ms Elisabeth Wolf, had been very successful, as evidenced by the accounts and photos published in the previous issue of Connect.

The next trip would be to Rome in October 2023, at the initiative of Mr Edgardo Iozia.

The president proposed that the assembly approve the new cooperation agreement between the EESC and the AFM (see article below).

Ms Elisabeth Wolf, standing in for the treasurer, Ms Laure Batut, who was unavailable, presented the 2022 accounts and the 2023 draft budget. Then Mr Robert Schadek certified the accuracy of the accounts.

Mr Edgardo Iozia presented the plan for the trip to Rome (see article below).

Lastly, the Association's new logo – which drew inspiration from the current Committee logo – was adopted.

The first part of the meeting was thus completed. Attendees were then invited to go to the Greek restaurant, Strofilia, for an excellent, very pleasant evening.

The following morning, the next part of the meeting opened with a statement by the president (see below), followed by a statement by the secretary-general. Mr Gianluca Brunetti underlined the considerable efforts made by the administration to adapt to the current tight budgetary constraints, combined with the severe upsets caused by the COVID-19 crisis and then the war in Ukraine. Digitalisation was progressing rapidly, with the possibility of remote meetings now having come into widespread use.

These two statements were followed by a debate which touched upon: the war in Ukraine; the need for the latter to join the European Union; and the consequences of Brexit, along with a desire to maintain links with the British. A question was raised about what place the Committee had in the manifestos of the parties standing in the European elections.

The group presidents – Mr Stefano Mallia for Group I, Mr Oliver Röpke for Group II and Mr Seamus Boland for Group III – each took the floor.

Lastly, Mr Juan Moreno presented his book, entitled *La leyenda negra de Largo Caballero* (see article).

The next meeting would be held in Rome in October, and the next General Assembly would be in the spring of 2024.

In the meantime, everyone was welcome to make a contribution to Connect, the Association's publication.

Beatrice Ouin

AFM Vice-President

AFM general assembly 2023





Given the blood spilt, Ukraine deserves fast-tracked accession to the European Union



On 23 June 2022, the European Union granted Ukraine – which was brutally attacked by Putin's totalitarian Russia on 24 February that year – candidate status. However, although President Volodymyr Zelensky has taken every opportunity since to call for emergency admission to the EU, and is quick to cite 2024 as his objective, Ukraine is now in the pre-accession waiting room, together with around ten other candidates, most of which have been waiting for a prolonged period, and its request in no way prejudices the outcome for its partners.

Foreseeable obstacles, both numerous and serious

The previous enlargements of the European Union have always been subject to strict adaptation requirements, most often taking a good ten years to fulfil. The only exception has been the accession of the former East Germany, in the exceptional context of German reunification. Another obstacle to accelerated accession is the recently introduced condition of institutional reform of the EU before any further enlargement, a prospect both highly complex and hugely uncertain. The failure in 2005 of the draft Constitutional Treaty, which was badly patched up by the 2007 Lisbon Treaty – a treaty that does not lend itself to a new large-scale enlargement – is testimony to this.

These are the prerequisites that many Member States do not hesitate to point out, beyond the gestures of sympathy, the increasing logistical and military support, the proliferation of reciprocal high-level visits and meetings, not to mention the standing ovations of Western parliaments in response to the unprecedented appeals from this Ukrainian president.

These serious obstacles to fast-tracked membership for Ukraine should not be underestimated, especially since the particular features of that country will require a particularly demanding adaptation process to meet the European criteria. Its current GDP level, which is well below the EU average, and even below that of most of the other

candidates, will require EU support that will have to meet the needs of a population of 44 million, which would make Ukraine one of the most populous Member States in the Union.

A huge number of reforms will have to be undertaken to bring Ukraine's structures into line with European standards, in particular as regards the legal transparency of its institutions, and especially in relation to the fight against corruption, although President Zelensky has made a start on this.

That said, upgrading the structures of the Ukrainian economy also promises, in view of its strong potential in the areas of mining (especially rare earths), industry, energy, and of course agriculture (with unparalleled grain production), to make it a valuable Member State, strengthening the EU's self-sufficiency and overall competitiveness. However, this prospect may also worry many Member States, starting with France, which is in no hurry to see its preeminent position in European agriculture being challenged in an unprecedented way on the markets, while at the same time being penalised by a redistribution of support from the common agricultural policy at its expense.

Moreover, the EU's political, economic and strategic centre of gravity will see a significant shift to the East. And here too, this shift may, rightly or wrongly, be of concern to a France which had already felt its central position slipping following the developments that began thirty years ago with German unification and then continued with

the major continental enlargement.

These are the main obstacles now facing the prospect of Ukraine's accelerated membership of the European Union. Given the particular problems anticipated from a French perspective, President Macron has voiced these reservations, at the risk of blurring his message among those who are unaware of the subtle nature of his famous "en même temps", as regards the intensity of support for Ukrainian membership.

Exceptional political stakes that are big enough to sweep away all these obstacles

However, these reservations expressed to varying degrees are counterbalanced by a dynamic that is spurring on President Zelensky's eagerness to seek membership for his country as a matter of urgency. This dynamic is embodied in the image as strong as it is iconic, as eloquent as it is convincing, of a charismatic president in combat fatigues, unyieldingly determined to defend our European freedoms without a second thought, while also fighting for those of his country against the aggression of an implacable dictatorship, an explicitly declared mortal enemy of our Western democratic values.

Thus, this situation cannot be compared to anything that has gone before in the history of the EU – or any other application for membership. Because for our Union of 2023, one fact is certain: once Putin's Russia deliberately entered into armed conflict in Europe – for the first time since 1945, and in defiance of all legal, diplomatic and civilisational rules – our entire frame of reference was suddenly turned upside down.

This "day after" requires the EU, backed by NATO, to fundamentally reprogram its DNA, which has hitherto been essentially devoted to the commercial organisation of a globalisation that we hoped would be successful. Today, faced with the realities of a war economy that nobody dares to call by its name, but which is becoming more of a reality every day, Europe is now forced to do the exact opposite of what it did yesterday.

Increasing the economic and financial sanctions against Russia, forced to sacrifice overnight the gigantic infrastructure supplying it with Russian energy, which had seemed like it would be there forever, forced to radically overhaul its economic and commercial strategy, affected by the at least ambiguous attitude of its partners in the "Global South" to the situation, undermined by the inscrutable positioning of its biggest trading partner, China, skilful at muddying the waters by playing all the cards and all the parts, but primarily invested in a strategy of global supremacy, the European Union continues to pay the price of its short-sightedness, if not its incoherence, and to suffer all of the fallout.

Indeed the list seems endless: complete military dependence on the US, with its direct political and economic consequences; the obligation to double or even triple national military budgets that had lain dormant for 30 years; the revival of dismantled arms sectors and industries; the reinvention of forgotten training and know-how; the weakening of Franco-German relations in a Europe both subject to American domination and severely shaken by the outbreak of war in the East; continuing turbulence in the post-COVID-19 economic recovery attempts; the emergency reception of millions of Ukrainian refugees arriving with nothing; the aggravation and multiplication of energy issues and deprivation; the questioning of climate plans; the spectacular return of inflation; and growing political and social tensions. The miracle is that, in such circumstances, the unity and solidarity of the EU has, against all odds, held firm.

The only credible response to a lawless dictatorship

On the military front, escalation at the EU's borders of the European Union is a reality, and there is nothing to suggest any de-escalation. Supporting the predominant US security assistance, and alongside a resurgent NATO, the EU has no option but to urgently deliver to Ukraine everything it can still provide, even if that means depleting its own national defence capabilities.

In a few months, we have thus gone from logistical reinforcements, medical aid and deliveries of light weapons, to shipments of armoured support vehicles, field artillery and missile batteries, then combat tanks and fighter planes. Round-the-clock air patrols, with the active involvement of French fighter jets, have been sweeping the thousands of kilometres of the eastern borders of the EU to deter any incursion by the Russian aggressor.

COVID-19 made us "play at war". Now, Putin's totalitarian, aggressive and imperialist Russia is imposing on Europe its own war, i.e. real war of the worst kind, with terror bombings, mass rape, torture and war crimes, deportations of entire populations and kidnapping of children, stolen from their families and their country. For the Member States neighbouring Russia, previously annexed by or satellite states of Russia, it is a cruel reminder of what they once had to endure under the Red Army, and the anguish of seeing its crimes repeated. And for Europe as a whole, this is the moment of truth. The first fighters of a democratised Europe had the motto: "Live free or die". Today's Ukrainians are their worthy heirs. Their exemplary motivation, their fierce resistance, their military intelligence, their

inventive ingenuity – their militarised drones and new, low-cost but highly efficient technologies, supported by the satellites of a relentless US surveillance of the slightest movements by the aggressor, have so far made it possible to push the Russian army into a deadly trap.

Yet Putin's Russia has proved unable to learn a single lesson. It sacrifices countless troops backed by militias made up of former prisoners, hoping to take advantage of a war of attrition. And, for good measure, it has moved nuclear missiles, reinforcing those in its advanced enclave of Kaliningrad with the unprecedented installation of new ones on the territory of its Belarusian vassal, taking pleasure in brandishing the threat of its "Russian roulette" – the supreme blackmail of threatening to bomb nuclear power stations, of using so-called tactical nuclear weapons, not to mention the ultimate apocalyptic threat of the use of intercontinental missiles.

Faced with the Stalinist criminality of the regime of Putin – who has already been indicted by the International Criminal Court – there is no longer room for any other attitude than a fearless, unflinching and unwavering determination to urgently welcome Ukraine into the European Union. In recognition of and in return for the blood that has been spilt, this would be a direct illustration of our physical and moral rearmament, which would be the clearest – and therefore the best – political response. In fact, this is the only response equal to Ukraine's sacrifices, Putin's provocations and the vital stakes of this war for Europe.

Fast-track membership possible in three stages

This fast-tracked process could be carried out in three stages. The first step would be to involve Ukraine immediately as a permanent guest in the EU's governing bodies (European Council, European Parliament, Commission), albeit without the right to vote, but with the right to express its view and participate. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) would also benefit from inviting Ukrainian counterparts to their meetings.

A second step could be to conclude the Accession Treaty as early as 2024, which the Member States and the European Parliament would be asked to ratify, with the aim of it entering into force in 2025. The pre-condition of prior reform of the EU should not apply

to that accession because of its unique nature, manageable within the framework of the current institutions and politically justified by the exceptional circumstances. For the same reasons, the other candidate countries should not be able to use this priority accession in order to force the preparation and implementation of their own – which would not mean that they would necessarily be penalised or delayed.

Finally, this accelerated membership for Ukraine, with full participation and voting rights, should in no way exempt it from the transition periods required for the full exercise of economic freedoms and full compliance with the common legal standards. This upgrading and compliance would thus be deferred to a third stage, under the supervision of the Commission and the European Court of Justice. The essential difference with previous accessions would therefore be, as a result of the urgency requirement, that the transition periods related to EU freedoms and obligations would take place mainly after, and not before, Ukraine's political accession.

As for the foreseeable resistance to such a departure from the "traditional" model of "slow and measured" accession to this Ukrainian "front-wheel drive" accession, which, although revolutionary, is fully justified by an extraordinary situation, we will leave it to history to answer, as is so often the case when dealing with exceptional challenges: "needs must!"

Bruno Vever

AFM member

Citizens' involvement in shaping EU policies

The Shadow Report story

The recently published Shadow Report is an excellent example of citizens' involvement and the famous bottom-up approach. It also shows why an EU macro-regional civil strategy would be such a helpful project.

The Shadow Report was initiated by my organisation, the European House, and eight other civil society organisations, as a civic response to the European Commission's report on the implementation

the European Commission's 3rd biennial report (green transition, digitalisation, enlargement etc.), but also brings in new elements: state of civil society in the macro-regions, human contacts, solidarity, raising public awareness, increased feeling of ownership.

CSOs participating in this initiative provided not only their insights, but concrete suggestions as well. These suggestions at the end of each chapter pave the way for next steps. All the observations based on the everyday lives and experiences of citizens living in the four macro-regions resulted in a document with stimulating ideas.

Organisations all around Europe were given the possibility to comment on a variety of topics. This method resulted in revealing different – and sometimes contradictory – approaches of the contributors, which made the Shadow Report a diverse and colourful document. United in diversity, as the EU's motto says. Direct quotes were also included to make the report even more authentic and engaging.

A true measure of success: the European Commission's latest report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies released in December 2022 specifically mentions the Shadow Report. "As set out by the cross-MRS Shadow Report coordinated by the Budapest-based European House, civil society organisations play a vital role in contributing to better decision-making, in particular by bringing local and regional communities closer to the MRS."

This is an encouraging sign of recognition of citizens' meaningful contribution to EU policy-making.

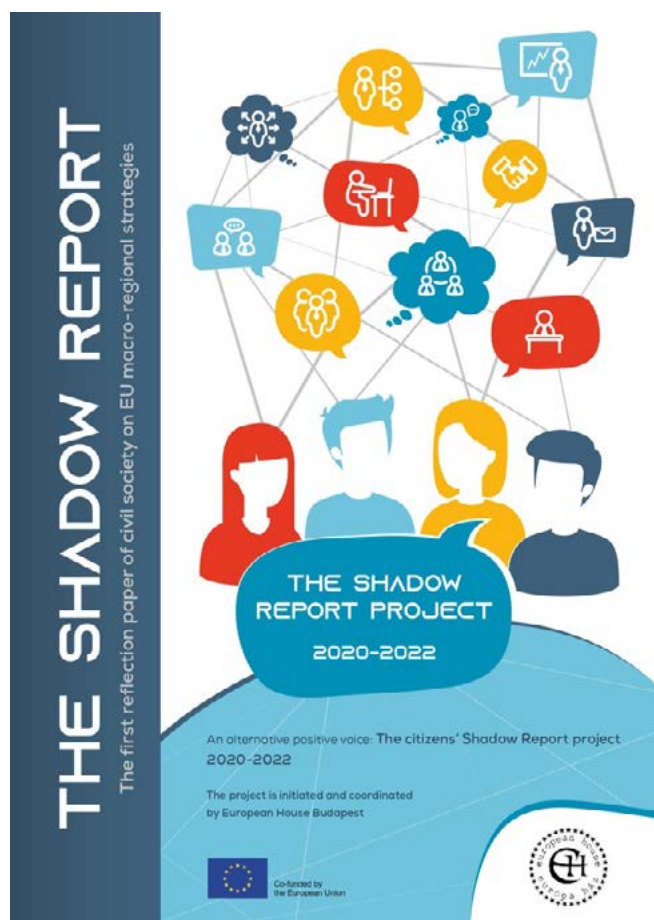
Next step: an EU macro-regional civil strategy

All these developments encouraged me to continue the work based on the results of the Shadow Report and the next ambitious and promising phase is the joint elaboration of an EU macro-regional civil strategy – further strengthening the involvement of civil society in the four macro-regions.

We live in times of unprecedented crisis and instability, when a clear and efficient civil strategy could serve as a compass showing the right direction to citizens, offering a long-term vision of European unity. Unity and cooperation are more necessary than ever in this European political landscape full of turmoil and uncertainty.

of macro-regional strategies. What makes the Shadow Report unique is that it brings together, for the first time, CSOs from the four macro-regions (the Baltic Sea, the Danube, the Adriatic-Ionian and the Alpine), giving them the opportunity to work together on specific European issues.

However, the Shadow Report does not compete in any way with the European Commission's document. It is definitely not a political analysis, but rather a public reflection involving civil society organisations. The report addresses not only the topics covered by



European democratic traditions are at stake, and civil society organisations have a key role to play in developing EU policies and safeguarding basic European values. Therefore, the main goal of a macro-regional civil strategy would be to promote the European project on local and regional levels, building a bridge between the EU institutions and citizens.

As a consequence, the civil strategy would strengthen the feeling of ownership of those involved. Just like the recent Conference on the Future of Europe – launched by the three most influential EU institutions (Parliament, Commission, Council) – reinforced the sense of ownership of all the participants.



Developing a macro-regional civil strategy is a truly pro-European initiative that could set an example in chaotic times when Euroscepticism is quickly gaining ground all over the continent. In response, our plan is to organise an open preparatory meeting in each of the four macro-regions during the year and a concluding event in the form of a citizens' agora in Budapest in December 2023 when a well-consulted civil strategy paper would be finalised and adopted.

Working hand-in-hand with the EESC

Following well-established practice, the EESC decided to respond to the Commission's 4th Implementation Report on macro-regional strategies. The process started with the setting up of a study group and I had the possibility to attend both of its meetings in March and May 2023 and contribute actively to their proceedings.



It was encouraging to see the convergence of ideas on such issues as increased involvement of civil society in macro-regional decision-making or support for the establishment of institutionalised citizens' dialogues across macro-regions. The idea of holding regular meetings of CSOs together with other stakeholders in the macro-regions is also a point for joint action. With combined efforts, the EU macro-regional policies can be made more visible and understandable for ordinary citizens.

All in all, my story illustrates how a still active former member can make a meaningful contribution to the elaboration of an EESC position. This encouraging situation opens up new possibilities for further joint actions. A specific example is the upcoming European Parliamentary elections (May 2024): it is our shared responsibility to contribute to its positive, pro-European outcome.

Miklós Barabás

*Director, European House Budapest
AFM member*

Prosperity – Peace – Freedom. Is Europe delivering on its promises?



After two years of pandemic, which in Europe led to 277 352 658 confirmed cases and 2 238 980 deaths (WHO data, 16 May 2023) translating into one COVID case per family, European citizens were plunged into another crisis – Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The economic crisis resulting from the forced reduction in economic activity, was eased by the European Central Bank's (ECB) expansionary policy – quantitative easing.

Barely out of the pandemic, we again fell into an unfortunate socio-economic spiral.

Mounting geo-political tension leading to the ongoing war that was started by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, pushed energy and food prices to levels never seen before in the age of the Euro. Speculation did the rest.

In order to cool inflation, the ECB implemented recessive policies, such as the gradual and steady increase in interest rates and reducing liquidity by EUR 15 billion per month (quantitative tightening).

Isabel Schnabel, Member of the Executive Board of the ECB, has estimated that it will take another six years at the ECB to re-absorb the excess liquidity in the eurozone.

Germany, a driver of the economy in Europe, has entered a recession and other countries will soon follow.

While the number of people entering poverty and absolute poverty is increasing in each Member State, the EU has allocated EUR 43.6

billion to security policies and border controls. The Peace Facility is used to buy weapons and it is not clear what role the EU (Nobel Peace Prize winner) is playing to promote peace talks around the world, starting with neighbouring Ukraine.

Reversing its anti-migration policies, the EU has welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees, especially in Poland, which had previously stood out for its inflexibility on the Belarusian border in accepting refugees, even from warzones. To open borders, the Council of the European Union adopted Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382, by which it triggered, for the first time, the mechanism provided for by Directive 2001/55/EC on temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons.

The Decision provides for the possibility for Ukrainian citizens and their families (as well as third-country nationals that had been receiving international protection before 24 February 2022) fleeing the country to reside and move around within the EU for a period of up to one year, which can be extended by the Council for another year (and, upon a proposal by the European Commission, for an additional year up to a maximum of three years, pursuant to Directive 2001/55/EC). They are also able to work and enjoy social rights such as the right to housing and healthcare.

This is an act of generosity, approved by all Europeans. It is impossible to understand why such provisions are not applicable to other areas affected by war. The observatory monitoring wars

around the world has found 70 wars currently ongoing – from Sudan to Myanmar to Afghanistan, from Yemen to Ethiopia (where only recently weapons have been silenced) from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to Burkina Faso, and to Syria where, since the start of the civil war 11 years ago, more than six million, seven hundred thousand people have been forced to leave their homes.

This double standard plays on the conscience of Europeans, who believe the values enshrined in the EU Treaties to be sacred and inviolable.

The role of Frontex is worrying, with its director, following an investigation by OLAF that revealed serious violations committed through the use of violence and illegal pushbacks, being forced to resign in exchange for immunity. Several media investigations had revealed the use of violence.

The level of freedom of citizens in Europe appears to be in decline. National laws violating the treaties are tolerated in different areas such as freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, peaceful

demonstration and LGBTQIA and women's rights. These laws are in stark contrast to EU values.

Lastly, the European Parliament was hit by a huge scandal at its top level, causing outrage and distrust within the European institutions.

As committed pro-Europeans, we believe that the European project, not just as something that deals with currency and trade, but as a driver of civilisation within the EU and around the world, should be highlighted.

The democracy void in Europe must be filled. The next European Parliament elections, which will elect the new Commission, are an important event which we will begin discussing during our next study visit to Rome.

Edgardo Iozia

AFM member

AFM memory



Hello everyone,

I believe that not many of you know me and I don't know many of you either.

But if I can take you back forty years, when a few former members suggested setting up an association that would let them keep in

touch, keep in the loop and even have the opportunity to come back to Brussels from time to time.

This call was heard and in 1983 the Association of Former Members of the EESC met for the first time in Brussels. The meeting was followed the next day by a visit to the port of Zeebrugge with lunch laid on by the port authorities.

I carried out the secretariat role for the association from the beginning and continued even after my retirement in 1989, but in 1991 I bowed out and resigned. I wasn't at all concerned; I left the association in good hands!

With a general assembly every year and around fifty trips organised across the Member States, the years have flown by and today, in 2023, we are celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the association, which is alive and well to judge by the great crowd here today.

Happy anniversary to the AFM, and I'll just finish up by thanking you for accepting me as a member, which gives me, too, the pleasure of returning to the Committee, where I spent a wonderful 15 years.

Andrée Lagae

AFM member

Megalithic Solstice Sunrise



As efforts continue to build and strengthen our European project, it is also timely to remind ourselves of Europe's extremely rich cultural heritage, a past that stretches back over many millennia, something that many other parts of the world are not able to enjoy nor emulate.

This heritage can even predate the Pyramids. Last December, I had the privilege to witness at first hand the dawn penetration of the winter solstice sunlight right into the very heart of the passage grave burial chamber at Newgrange in Ireland, some 40 km north of Dublin. This passage tomb dates back to at least 3 250 BCE, so older than the Pyramids, and at least 1 000 years older than Stonehenge in England.

Newgrange is part of the prehistoric Brú na Bóinne heritage site, tucked into a large curve or bend in the course of the River Boyne in Co Meath. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There are three passage graves within this complex. Another – Knowth – is aligned with the equinoxes. This part of Ireland is very rich in such cultural heritage and folklore, which includes the story of the "salmon

of knowledge" which gave the warrior king, Fionn MacCumhail, profound powers when he accidentally tasted it. However, it also lies very close to the site of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, when the Protestant King William III (although supported by the Pope) defeated the Catholic King James II, backed by Louis XIV. The ramifications of that battle still resonate in Northern Ireland today, leading directly to the Belfast, or Good Friday, Agreement, never far from today's news.

As a child I used to visit these sites regularly but, although they were known to be highly significant then, recent research has been able to uncover and discover so much more.

There are some 250 passage tombs in Ireland, but Newgrange is by far the most significant. These consist of stone-lined passages, 19m long at Newgrange, leading to a burial chamber, which is in turn covered by a mound of earth and stones: all part of a megalithic tomb tradition, with human remains at its heart.

What makes Newgrange so special is that at dawn on the shortest day of the year, on a clear day, a shaft of sunlight penetrates the length of that 19m passage, right to the heart of the tomb. That alone is astonishing enough for a prehistoric site, but it required the addition of a separate "roof box" at the entrance to allow this to happen. The entrance itself is formed by two large upright stones roofed over with a large rectangular slab or lintel stone. On top of that, there is an extra rectangular opening, a deliberate gap between the top of the first roof-stone and the base of the second one. It is through this second opening that the solstice sunrise penetrates into the heart of the chamber.

The passage itself is constructed with large upright stones up to 2m high (22 on one side, 21 on the other, many decorated and dressed) which are roofed with large transverse stones. The roof becomes higher nearer to the centre of the chamber. The passage slopes gently upwards, probably following the original ground level, which makes Newgrange one of the oldest buildings in the world. It is up this slope that this pencil of golden sunlight enters the chamber, stays for a few minutes and then slowly recedes again.

The entrance itself was originally closed off with a large upright stone, with the iconic circling pattern so often used today to denote things Irish. The roof-box opening was also closed with two quartz blocks, moved aside for the solstice ceremonies, about which very little is yet known.



The actual chamber is also a very sophisticated structure. It has many decorated stones, a conical corralled roof up to 6m high, and three recesses with linteled roofs, each containing large stone basins, probably part of the original ceremonials. The solstice sunlight just reaches the back recess, but can light up the whole chamber. The mathematical precision required to achieve all this, and so long ago, adds to the sense of awe and wonder at witnessing the phenomenon.

There is already some daylight as one goes into the passage chamber, but it is that magic golden pencil of sunlight suddenly coming into the tomb that really takes one's breath away. It broadens into a wider shaft (17cm at its maximum) before slowly withdrawing again, illuminating the tomb for some 15-17 minutes in all.

Imagine then what Professor Michael O'Kelly, then Professor of Archaeology at University College, Cork, must have felt when, in 1967, he put his theory to the test, entered the passage chamber alone before dawn that winter solstice, and watched that beam of light which had probably not been witnessed for hundreds, if not

thousands of years. He had started to excavate at Newgrange in 1962, work that he continued for many years afterwards.

Local tradition had long held the connection with the solstices, and Newgrange has been a tourist attraction of sorts since 1699, so any human remains have long since disappeared. As a child I remember entering the passage chamber at will – I recall a small admission fee to the site with a small shop – and Newgrange itself was just a large mound, long before its quartz facade had been restored.

The mound itself reaches up to 13m high, has a diameter of some 80m, covers about half a hectare and appears to have waterproofing included to prevent water from seeping into the chamber. The mound itself is surrounded by some 97 contiguous, distinctive kerbstones at ground level. Some of these are decorated, notably those at the entrance and at its 180 degree opposite point; it is thought that these kerbstones were decorated after being put in place.

The passage grave at Knowth, also part of the complex, and aligned with the equinoxes, has never been open to the public in my lifetime, not least as the passageway remains unstable. However Dowth, the third main site, if the least impressive, is still open to all comers as before. The major excavations at Newgrange and Knowth are fully documented and published.





The World Heritage Site in all comprises some 780ha, with at least 90 other recorded monuments lying scattered around this area. It forms Europe's largest and most important concentration of prehistoric megalithic art, and was used for extensive social, economic, religious and funerary functions, not least as shown by the enormous lengths the prehistoric settlers went to, to achieve the mathematical precision that they did. Sadly, what their rites and practices actually were have yet to be determined and may never be so.

There are of course many other world sites where the solstices and equinoxes were key to their design, not least Stonehenge in England, Chichen Itza in Mexico, Ollantaytambo in Peru, not to mention the incredible mathematics behind the construction of the Pyramids, both those in Egypt and Mexico. Newgrange, however, must be one of the oldest.

To witness this actual event is mind-blowing and puts everything else into perspective, but admission is not easy to achieve. In December 2022, it was offered on four consecutive mornings, but numbers were limited to about 15-20 people at a time, so very few actually get to see it. Then there is the added lottery of gaining a clear sky, which happened on two of those four mornings. Applications

have to be made each year, with on average thousands being received, so again a complete lottery. It was my daughter, Kitty, who applied, as she had done each year for over 20 years before finally being successful. After gathering at the Visitors Centre one is now bussed to the site (the old road is no longer accessible). By then it is already quite light but of course the sun has yet to rise over the hill in question. However, many others are also enabled to watch the solstice from the outside of the monument, if yet to match the summer solstice crowds at Stonehenge, but of course they cannot enter. Truly this is a once in a lifetime experience!

Jonathan Peel

AFM member

I have lost a friend. We have all lost a friend



Pierre Boulnois, one of the first members of the EESC, and since then a member of our Association of Former Members, left us unexpectedly on 6 October 2022, in his seventy-seventh year.

A true stalwart, he attended all of our meetings with his wife, Françoise. The last was in Bilbao and Guernica, between 14 and 18 September 2022 – less than three weeks before his death. Pierre and Françoise had three children, Sophie, Claire and Vincent, and five grandchildren. We will miss his cheerful nature, and he leaves a huge void in our lives.

Pierre ran a farm of some 200 hectares in Bussy, in the Oise department. He helped organise the red fruit sector, especially raspberries, which he had grown himself for a long time, as well as beet. I had the honour of visiting his farm during a stay in the region – in May 2012 I stayed at his home with my youngest daughter, Isadora, and he showed me around Noyon and the surrounding area.

After completing his military service, he served as an active member of the Oise department's Centre for Young Farmers, of which he became President in 1967. From 1978 to 1980, he was vice-president of the National Centre for Young Farmers, responsible for European and international affairs, and was appointed to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), succeeding

Joseph Daul. He later left the "youth" movement and the EESC to hold high-ranking positions in agricultural trade unionism.

A farmer, a scholar and a humanist, he wrote numerous articles, notably for *Paysans et Société* magazine. These included "The 21st Century" (2021) and "A look at German energy policy" (2019), in which he shared his thoughts after our association's study trip to Germany. The trip was superbly organised by our most senior member Rudolf Schnieders and included the visit to the opencast peatlands of Jülich, which are highly polluting but preferred to the nuclear industry.

To keep him in our thoughts, I will end this tribute with this excerpt from an article of his entitled "Tackling intolerance", which was written in 2018 but seems more topical than ever:

"For centuries, the French have loved to tackle a large number of topics, from the most superficial to the most crucial. These silly, futile little wars were mocked by Rabelais and Molière, among others. Yet, nowadays, divisions are more pronounced, confrontations more brutal, allusions more venomous, denunciations more common and respectful dialogue rarer. Intolerance is seen as a virtue.

This downward spiral of society is accentuated by immediate information, provided continuously without taking a step back, and where the emotional, sensational and dramatic are favoured over objective analysis. The essential thing is the audience, who bring in advertising and thus income. To compete with the internet and social networks, large media outlets have begun to copy them, with all their excesses: manipulating facts, highlighting situations which are almost unique but presented as widespread, leaving out realities which counter the arguments presented, and even providing false information (...)."

He ended his article with these words:

"We should be proud of our profession and our role in society. This will give us the courage and conviction necessary to carry out the task of re-establishing truth."

As the Romans said two thousand years ago: May the earth rest lightly upon him!

Michel De Grave
AFM member

Tribute Francis John Whitworth



John Whitworth, 97 "It was a fine day," wrote John Whitworth, managing director of Cunard, at the launch of the QE2 on September 20, 1967, "and the yard and its environs were packed with spectators. Many of us wore bowler hats the last occasion on which I wore mine." John Brown, the Scottish shipbuilding firm, had invited Queen Elizabeth II to launch the ship, "handing her an envelope which contained the ship's name". It had been agreed that it could

be given the same name as the liner named after her mother, but avoiding the suffix "Second" not least because it had been built in Scotland, where the Queen was in fact the first Elizabeth to rule. But, according to John, "the Queen brushed this aside and said 'I name this ship Queen Elizabeth the Second,' much to the surprise of, and no little consternation among, the Cunard party present". In time the ship became known as the QE2, simply the second liner. A showcase for British design, it became an icon for passenger ships for the next 40 years.

Francis John Whitworth, known as John, was born in Wimbledon, southwest London, in 1925. He was the only child of Francis, who had moved up from a managerial position on the railways to a position at the Admiralty, and Helen (née Tait), a housewife and active volunteer.



Left – with Elizabeth II on the QE2 before her maiden voyage in 1969

For the Cunard Line, John worked in London, Liverpool, New York, Southampton and Montreal.

With Cunard close to bankruptcy, John was instructed to sell the Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mary. Both went abroad. The

Queen Mary was sold for \$3.45 million to the City of Long Beach in California, where it became a luxury floating hotel, and the Queen Elizabeth was auctioned for \$3.2 million to a Hong Kong shipping magnate as a floating university. For Cunard the days of transporting passengers from A to B were over; it was time to market leisure cruises.

The British Shipping Federation, the association of employers in the industry, had a post for a director of industrial relations and John made a natural fit. When the federation merged with the Chamber of Shipping in 1975 he became deputy director-general and was the spokesman for shipping companies worldwide over seafarers' conditions of service. It led, in his retirement in 1987, to membership of the European Economic and Social Committee. He was a passionate European. In 1994 he was appointed OBE for services to shipping.



Caution and discretion tended to prevail. His children remember a contact John had in the National Union of Seamen, a nameless but punctual figure known to them only as "Cuckoo Clock Man" on account of the background chimes that could be heard before they passed the phone over to their father. Consideration for others was his watchword.

Trade mission to Estonia and the Go Global Awards 2022



The International Trade Council (ITC), in cooperation with the Estonian development agency Enterprise Estonia, held the 2022 Go Global Awards in Tallinn. The Latvian Traders' Association took the main prize in the trade association group.

The Oscars of the business world, the B2B conference and awards ceremony brought together hundreds of top-level managers from the world's most innovative producers, processors and exporters as well as representatives of government authorities, trade associations, venture capital companies and financial institutions.

It is no coincidence that this international event was held in Estonia. Its vision for the future and the dizzying pace of development there call attention to its bold decisions and progressive solutions. Estonia is famed for being the world's most digitally advanced society, its

legislation is transparent and designed to help businesses grow and not hamper progress with red tape.

Inspiring examples

99% of public services in Estonia are online, it takes 15 minutes to start a business and tax documents can be completed in three minutes. Today the only things citizens have to do in person are marry, divorce or make individual property-related transactions. Everything else can be done online.

Although Estonia is a small country, with only 1.3 million residents, it already has almost 100 000 e-residents and more than 20% of all new businesses created in Estonia are e-residents. Estonia has the highest number of unicorn start-ups (start-ups with a value of USD 1 billion) and venture capital investments per capita in Europe. Estonia currently has 10 unicorn start-ups, with a target of 25 by 2025. Estonia is also a global pioneer with the first national AI/robot law. As a result, Starship Technologies has been operating level-4 autonomous robots – driverless vehicles that are licensed to drive on public roads – on public streets in Estonia for more than four



(Signed with Confero) The Latvian company Confero was awarded the main prize in the field of information technology.

jim jaunajiem uzņēmumiem ir e-rezidenti. Igaunijā ir visvairāk jaunuzņēmumu, vienradžu (jaunuzņēmums, kas ir saņiedzis miljards USD vērtību) un riska kapitāla investīciju uz vienu iedzīvotāju

Eiropā. Šobrīd Igaunijā ir 10 vienrādži, bet mērķis līdz 2025. gadam iegūt 25 vienrādžus," sacīja Džēmsis Passals. Igaunijā ir arī bijuši pionieri pasaulē - pirmā valsts mēroga AI robotu likuma izstrādē. Rezultāti *Starship Technologies* jau vairāk nekā četrus gadus Igaunijas publiskajā ielās ekspluatē 4. ģimeņa autonomos piegādes robotus. Igaunijas autonomo sistēmu izstrādātājs *Cleveron* ir ieguvis pirmo bezvadītāju transportlīdzekli Eiropā, kas ir licencēti braukšanai pa koplietošanas ceļiem visā valstī. Šos faktus praktiski papildināja sabiedrības veikalā piedāvājums un ēdīnāšas uzņēmumu tradīciju savienošana ar novitāti. **LT**

JUAN MORENO

El llamado «Largo español» que se convirtió en el único columnista del Gobierno de España y un líder esencial del siglo xxi.

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NEGRA DE
LARGO
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