

**FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE COMMISSION TO THE OPINIONS
OF THE**

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

PLENARY SESSION OF MARCH 2018

N°	Title	References
SG		
1.	<p>Regulation on the European Citizens' Initiative (sub-committee)</p> <p>Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Citizens' Initiative</p> <p>Rapporteur: Kinga JOÓ (GR11-HU)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 482 final – 2017/0220 COD</p> <p>EESC-2017-05659-00-01-PAC-TRA</p> <p>SC/049</p>
2.	<p>Support to structural reforms in the Member States</p> <p>Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2017/825 to increase the financial envelope of the Structural Reform Support Programme and adapt its general objective</p> <p>Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 as regards support to structural reforms in Member States</p> <p>Rapporteur: Mihai IVAȘCU (GR11-RO) Co-rapporteur: Stefano PALMIERI (GR11-IT)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 825 final – 2017/0334 COD</p> <p>COM(2017) 826 final – 2017/0336 COD</p> <p>COM(2017) 826 final/2 – 2017/0336 COD</p> <p>EESC-2018-00702-00-00-AC-TRA</p> <p>ECO/450</p>

DG GROW		
3.	<p>Mid-term evaluation of the Copernicus programme (2014-2020) (report)</p> <p>Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Mid-term review of the Copernicus programme (2014-2020)</p> <p>Rapporteur: Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (GRIII-LT)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 617 final</p> <p>EESC-2017-06089-00-00-AC-TRA</p> <p>INT/837</p>
4.	<p>Intellectual property package (communication)</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee – A balanced IP enforcement system responding to today’s societal challenges</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee – Guidance on certain aspects of Directive 2004/48/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the enforcement of intellectual property rights</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee – Setting out the EU approach to standard essential patents</p> <p>Rapporteur: Franca SALIS-MADINIER (GRII-FR)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 707 final</p> <p>COM(2017) 708 final</p> <p>COM(2017) 712 final</p> <p>EESC-2017-06184-00-01-PA-TRA</p> <p>INT/840</p>
DG CNECT		
5.	<p>Tackling illegal content online – towards an enhanced responsibility of online platforms (communication)</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Tackling illegal content online – Towards an enhanced responsibility of online platforms</p> <p>Rapporteur: Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (GRIII-ES)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 555 final</p> <p>EESC-2017-05365-00-00-AC-TRA</p> <p>INT/836</p>

DG FISMA		
6.	<p>Completing the Banking Union (communication)</p> <p>Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on completing the Banking Union</p> <p>Rapporteur: Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (GRIII-ES) Co-rapporteur: Daniel MAREELS (GRI-BE)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 592 final</p> <p>EESC-2017-05496-00-00-AC-TRA</p> <p>ECO/443</p>
DG RTD		
7.	<p>Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2019-2020) complementing the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation</p> <p>Proposal for a Council Regulation on the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2019-2020) complementing the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation</p> <p>Rapporteur: Jacques LEMERCIER (GRII-FR)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 698 final – 2017/0312 NLE</p> <p>EESC-2017-06223-00-01-PA-TRA</p> <p>INT/842</p>

DG TAXUD		
8.	<p>VAT reform package (I)</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee on the follow-up to the Action Plan on VAT – Towards a single EU VAT area – Time to act</p> <p>Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EU) No 904/2010 as regards the certified taxable person</p> <p>Proposal for a Council implementing regulation amending Implementing Regulation (EU) No 282/2011 as regards certain exemptions for intra-Community transactions</p> <p>Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 2006/112/EC as regards harmonising and simplifying certain rules in the value added tax system and introducing the definitive system for the taxation of trade between Member States</p> <p>Rapporteur: Giuseppe GUERINI (GR11-IT) Co-rapporteur: Krister ANDERSSON (GR1-SE)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 566 final</p> <p>COM(2017) 567 final – 2017/0248 CNS</p> <p>COM(2017) 568 final – 2017/0249 NLE</p> <p>COM(2017) 569 final – 2017/0251 CNS</p> <p>EESC-2017-05392-00-00-AC-TRA</p> <p>ECO/442</p>
DG EMPL		
9.	<p>Employment guidelines</p> <p>Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States</p> <p>Rapporteur: Michael McLOUGHLIN (GR11-IE)</p>	<p>COM(2017) 677 final – 2017/0305 NLE</p> <p>EESC-2017-00759-00-01-PA-TRA</p> <p>SOC/558</p>
10.	<p>A socially sustainable concept for raising living standards, boosting growth and employment, as well as citizens' security in the digital era</p> <p>Rapporteur: Giulia BARBUCCI (GR11-IT)</p>	<p>EESC-2017-05563-00-00-AC-TRA</p> <p>SOC/568</p> <p>Exploratory opinion requested by the Bulgarian presidency</p>

11.	<p>Future of work – acquiring of appropriate knowledge and skills to meet the needs of future jobs</p> <p>Rapporteur: Cinzia DEL RIO (GRII-IT) Co-rapporteur: Milena ANGELOVA (GRI-BG)</p>	<p>EESC-2017-05265-00-00-AC-TRA</p> <p>SOC/570</p> <p>Exploratory opinion requested by the Bulgarian presidency</p>
DG DEVCO (EEAS associated)		
12.	<p>A renewed impetus of the Africa-EU Partnership (communication)</p> <p>Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council – for a renewed impetus of the Africa-EU Partnership</p> <p>Rapporteur: Mihai MANOLIU (GRI-RO)</p>	<p>JOIN(2017) 17 final</p> <p>EESC-2017-05043-00-00-AC-TRA</p> <p>REX/495</p>

<p>N°1 Proposal for a Regulation on the European Citizens’ Initiative COM(2017) 482 final EESC 2017/5659 – SC/049 533rd Plenary Session - March 2018 Rapporteur: Ms Kinga JOÓ (GR11-HU) SG – First Vice-President TIMMERMANS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.1. The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes the following improvements contained in the new proposal by the Commission for a Regulation on the European citizens’ initiative.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee’s opinion and its support of the proposal for a new Regulation on the European Citizens’ Initiative. Increasing democratic legitimacy in the European Union through stronger citizen participation is among the ten priorities of the Juncker Commission (Priority 10 – A Union of Democratic Change). The proposal, making the European Citizens’ Initiative more accessible, less burdensome and easier to use for organisers and supporters, will help the European Citizens’ Initiative instrument reach its full potential to foster citizen participation at Union level, and to bring the Union closer to them. The Commission also takes careful note of the recommendations by the European Economic and Social Committee regarding a number of elements of the proposal.</p>
<p>1.5.1. The roles of institutional mentor and decision-maker at registration, both of which are currently performed by the Commission, should be separated. The European Economic and Social Committee reiterates that it is willing to continue to support initiatives and would be a natural</p>	<p>The European Citizens’ Initiative is a right as provided by Article 11(4) of the Treaty of the European Union. In this context, the Commission considers it has a responsibility to provide information and assistance to citizens concerning the European Citizens’</p>

candidate for the role of facilitator and institutional mentor.

Initiative, as set out in Article 4 of the proposal. The Commission welcomes involvement and support by all Union Institutions and advisory bodies, including the European Citizens' Initiative, within the framework of their respective competences, and is open to discuss further improvements and opportunities for practical cooperation in this regard. In particular, the Commission welcomes the commitment of the European Economic and Social Committee to the European Citizens' Initiative, including through the organisation of the annual "European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Day" events and the other forms of support it provides to citizens and organisers.

The Commission remains the Institution responsible for assessing whether the proposed citizens' initiatives meet the requirements for registration, in application of the competences under the Treaties and in view of the fact that the Commission is the addressee of the initiative and responsible (under Article 15 of the proposal) for examination of, and replying to, successful initiatives. It should be noted that at the registration stage, the Commission does not assess the initiative on substance: the decision on whether to register or not a proposed initiative is based only on the legal admissibility of the proposal in application of the requirements for registration under the Regulation. The proposal also introduces a number of improvements to the registration procedure.

The proposal contains improvements as regards the participation and involvement of all European Union

	<p>Institutions and advisory bodies, including the European Economic and Social Committee, during the examination phase, notably during the public hearing at the European Parliament.</p>
<p>1.5.2. Following the European Economic and Social Committee's example of inviting European Citizens' Initiative organisers to various debates in its European Citizens' Initiative Group, sections and plenary sessions, European Citizens' Initiative organisers should have more dialogue opportunities during and after their campaign, and dialogue with successful European Citizens' Initiatives should not necessarily end with the Commission's formal response.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of enhancing dialogue as well as communication and debate on the European Citizens' Initiative and specific initiatives. The proposal already includes a number of improvements in this field, notably as regards the public hearing at the European Parliament, advice and support to organisers, including the new online collaborative platform, and communication actions, including informing signatories by email on the Commission response to the initiatives. The Commission is open to discuss practical improvements to further improve dialogue opportunities and communication actions on the European Citizens' Initiative with the other European Union Institutions and bodies, including with the European Economic and Social Committee.</p>
<p>1.5.3. The European Economic and Social Committee also considers it important to build on its annual conference, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Day, as a place for dialogue, to put more emphasis on the exchange of best practice between the organisers and to create more networking opportunities for ongoing and successful organisers.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the organisation by the Committee of the annual "European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Day" events. The Commission agrees on the importance of enhancing advice and support to organisers, including exchanging of best practice between the organisers and to create more networking opportunities for ongoing and successful organisers. The proposal introduces a number of improvements in this field, including in particular the new online collaborative</p>

	<p>platform for the European Citizens' Initiative. A first version of such a collaborative platform, developed under a pilot project from the European Parliament, was presented at the "European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Day" of 10 April 2018, and will provide citizens and organisers with a discussion forum and information and advice on the European Citizens' Initiative.</p>
<p>1.5.4. Successful initiatives should have appropriate follow-up. With this goal in mind, the European Economic and Social Committee would hope to see all the European Union Institutions equally involved in creating opportunities for the organisers to present and debate their initiatives, in line with the European Economic and Social Committee's example of inviting European Citizens' Initiative organisers to various debates. The European Economic and Social Committee sees it as particularly important that the successful initiatives be debated in the plenary sessions of the European Parliament to increase the political dimension of the European debate on European Citizens' Initiative-related issues.</p>	<p>The Commission fully agrees on the importance of giving organisers the possibility to present and debate their initiatives, and with the need for involvement of all European Union Institutions and advisory bodies in the examination phase. The proposal introduces several improvements in this phase, notably its extension from three to five months to allow more time for debate on the initiatives before the adoption of the Commission response. It also introduces improvements with regard to the hearing in the European Parliament, notably with a view to ensuring a balanced and inclusive representation of all stakeholders concerned by the initiative; and representation of other Institutions and advisory bodies in the hearing including the European Economic and Social Committee. The possibility for a debate in European Union plenary sessions falls within the remit of the European Parliament.</p>
<p>1.5.6. In view of its recommendation to guarantee a balanced division of competences between European Union</p>	<p>The Commission would like to clarify that the current Regulation (EU) No 211/2011¹ provides explicitly that the</p>

¹ Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative, OJ L 65, 11.3.2011.

<p>Institutions as regards the European Citizens' Initiative, the European Economic and Social Committee supports the position expressed by civil society that the European Parliament should continue to be the sole organiser of the public hearing for successful initiatives, with the Commission represented at an appropriate level. Public hearings at the European Parliament constitute a crucial event for organisers of successful European Citizens' Initiatives to express their objectives, and to engage with Members of the European Parliament, who are the representatives of the wider body of European Union citizens.</p>	<p>Commission and the European Parliament shall ensure the organisation of the public hearing. This element of the proposal remains equivalent to the current Regulation and does not introduce any substantive modification. Against this background, the Commission fully agrees on the importance of the hearing at the European Parliament as a mechanism for dialogue and exchange of views between European Union Institutions and organisers of successful European Citizens' Initiatives.</p>
<p>1.5.7. The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes the Commission's proposal to allow for registration of part of a European Citizens' Initiative proposal. However, a single registration decision should be maintained.</p>	<p>The Commission notes that the proposal indeed provides for the possibility for partial registration of proposed citizens' initiatives under certain conditions and also ensures that a single decision is adopted in relation to the requests for registration of proposed citizens' initiatives.</p> <p>In case the initiative falls manifestly outside the framework of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for a legal act, the proposal provides that the Commission informs the organisers of its assessment within one month of its submission. This new step will provide organisers with an opportunity to amend, maintain or withdraw the initiative before the Commission's decision. This will benefit organisers and will contribute to reducing the risk that an initiative is found to be inadmissible.</p>
<p>1.5.8. Given the importance of the European Citizens' Initiative European Union democracy, its recent introduction,</p>	<p>The proposal provides that the Commission shall periodically review the functioning of the European</p>

<p>and considering that the time that will be needed to implement the changes resulting from the current legislative review will be significant, the time period for review of the European Citizens' Initiative should remain at three years.</p>	<p>Citizens' Initiative and present a report to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of the Regulation no later than five years from the date of application, and every five years thereafter and that the reports shall be made public. The Commission considers that the period of five years for the review of the Regulation, which takes into account that the lifecycle of a European Citizens' Initiative is extended by the proposal and can have a potential duration of up to 21 months, is proportionate to allow for an appropriate implementation period and subsequent review process including gathering evidence on results and impacts.</p>
<p>1.5.9. The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes that the Commission recognises the value of and continued need for the translation service provided by the European Economic and Social Committee since 2015. The Commission's future provision of translation services should also include the translation of the annexes to a European Citizens' Initiative proposal. This is important to facilitate fuller public understanding of the initiative proposals.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of this suggestion. The proposal already provides that the Commission shall provide the translation of the content of all registered initiatives into all the official languages of the Union. The organisers may, in addition, provide translations into all the official languages of the Union of the Annex and also, as the case may be, of the draft legal act, submitted as part of the request for registration.</p>
<p>1.5.10. The European Economic and Social Committee recognises the value of, and the need for, further debate to decide whether to lower the minimum age for supporting a European Citizens' Initiative.</p>	<p>The Commission considers that lowering the age of support to 16 years of age is an important improvement foreseen in the proposal which would enhance participation of the younger generation in the democratic debate at European Union level, by allowing more than ten million young European citizens to support European Citizens' Initiatives.</p>

<p>N°2 Support to structural reforms in the Member States COM(2017) 825 final, COM(2017) 826 final EESC 2016/0702 – ECO/450 533rd Plenary Session – March 2018 Rapporteur: Mr Mihai IVAȘCU (GR11-RO) Corapporteur: Mr Stefano PALMIERI (GR11-IT) SG – Vice-President DOMBROVSKIS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>The European Economic and Social Committee is supportive of the proposal to increase the budget of the Structural Reform Support Programme and to set up a reform delivery tool for the fulfilment of Member States' "reform commitments". Priority should go to the reforms that have direct spill-over effects on the other Member States. While the increase in the Structural Reform Support Programme budget is welcomed, its scale is insufficient considering the growing number of requests from Member States. Special attention should be given to non-euro-area Member States that are on track to joining the euro area.</p>	
<p>1.2. (...) The European Economic and Social Committee, in accordance with its previous opinions, advocates structural reforms geared towards social and economic development, including institutional capacity-building to improve administrative quality. Such reforms should be country-specific and backed by democratic support, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach for all Member States.</p> <p>3.10. The European Economic and Social Committee, in accordance with its previous opinions, advocates structural reforms geared towards social and economic development: more and better jobs, competitiveness of and competition in manufacturing and services, administrative and institutional quality, good and efficient</p>	<p>A specific feature of the Structural Reform Support Programme is that the support provided under the Programme for the implementation of structural reforms is based upon the request of the Member State and is tailor-made to meet its specific needs. Member States can request support for the reforms in the context of the European Union economic governance (e.g. Country-Specific Recommendations under the European Semester and implementation of the European Union law), when implementing an economic adjustment programme or for reforms undertaken at their own initiative.</p>

<p>public services and environmental sustainability². Such reforms should be country-specific, consistent with National Reform Programmes and backed by democratic support, not a one-size-fits-all approach for all Member States.</p>	
<p>1.3. The European Economic and Social Committee highlights that structural reforms are positive not only if they reduce public expenditure in a socially sustainable way, but also when they increase it in the short term, in order to improve the Member States' budget balance in the medium to long term.</p> <p>4.2. (...) The European Economic and Social Committee recommends that the Commission work with the Member States to pursue different avenues for fiscal and budgetary sustainability. Some reforms could imply more public expenditure in the short term, in order to implement new processes and activities which will contribute to saving resources or collecting more revenue in the medium to long term only. Therefore, it is advisable not to look only at short-term cost cutting measures, but at ways to increase budget revenues as well.</p>	<p>The structural reforms are designed to boost competitiveness, potential growth and economic and social resilience, and their benefits may often materialise only over the medium to longer term.</p> <p>The Structural Reform Support Programme is a bottom-up programme, and the initiative for requesting support from the Commission lies with the Member States.</p> <p>It is up to the national authorities to determine the policy areas where they wish to seek assistance. This can indeed include public finance areas, for example public financial and asset management, budget process, debt management and revenue administration. The support under the Structural Reform Support Programme does not determine the policy approach of Member States with respect to a particular structural reform, since the ownership of reforms remains with the Member States themselves.</p> <p>However, advice can be offered on various ways of implementing specific reforms and on improving the efficiency of operation of administrative systems</p>

² For example, improving the business environment, the financing of companies and Research and Development expenditure; increasing the productivity of companies, sectors and economies; promoting the creation of good quality jobs with higher wages, and the simultaneous reduction of temporary and unstable jobs with low wages; strengthening collective bargaining, and the autonomy of the social partners in it, and social dialogue at local, regional, national and European levels; reforming public administrations to make them more effective for economic and social development, and more transparent for the public; promoting the quality of education and training systems for workers to bring about equal opportunities and results for all social groups.

	<p>such as those designed to achieve particular budgetary objectives.</p> <p>In compliance with Article 16 of the Regulation establishing the Structural Reform Support Programme³, an ex-post evaluation is planned for 2021 with the purpose of assessing the longer term impacts of the Programme and the results of the technical support activities carried out. Still, it is for the Member States to make best use of the support received and for the design and ultimate implementation of the reforms.</p>
<p>1.4. (...)While the increase in the Structural Reform Support Programme budget is welcomed, its scale is insufficient considering the growing number of requests from the Member States. For 2018 alone, the requests amount to five times the proposed budget.</p> <p>3.3. (...)The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes the increased funding for the Structural Reform Support Programme but questions the effectiveness of the measure, considering the volume of requests from the Member States.</p> <p>3.9. (...)Taking into consideration the limited resources, the European Economic and Social Committee believes that the Commission should support reforms and measures that could have a multiplier effect for the actions carried out by Member States on their own.</p>	<p>The objective of the Structural Reform Support Programme amendment is to increase the budget of the Structural Reform Support Programme (from EUR 142.8 million to EUR 222.8 million) with the view to help satisfy the very high demand from the Member States (four to five times more than the annual 2017-2018 budgets) and also to provide targeted support to non-euro-area Member States, which want to adopt the euro and need to implement reforms in their economies.</p> <p>The proposed budget increase represents an additional resource to be allocated under the current Multiannual Financial Framework taking into account the budgetary constraints. At the same time, there is also a possibility for Member States to add additional funding by transfers of technical assistance resources available under shared management in the European Structural and Investment Funds, pursuant to</p>

³ Regulation (EU) 2017/825 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on the establishment of the Structural Reform Support Programme for the period 2017 to 2020 and amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 1305/2013, OJ L 129, 19.5.2017, p. 1–16.

	<p>Article 11 of the Structural Reform Support Programme Regulation.</p> <p>As far as effectiveness is concerned, with only 11 months into the Programme implementation, it is too early to conduct a full assessment, as the projects are ongoing or have only started to be implemented.</p> <p>In any event, already now, it is fair to say that the Structural Reform Support Programme contributes strongly to consistent implementation of Union law and policies. Around 90% of the projects selected for funding in 2017 and 2018 contribute directly to addressing the European Union's strategic priorities under European Union economic governance, Union priorities or Union law.</p>
<p>1.5. On the other hand, the European Economic and Social Committee believes that it is very important that the Commission presents its intentions regarding the distribution of the new Structural Reform Support Programme budget transparently - which is not the case in this proposal - and develop clear selection criteria.</p> <p>3.5. (...) The European Economic and Social Committee considers very important that the Commission present its intentions regarding the distribution of the new Structural Reform Support Programme budget transparently, so that every Member State can receive a fair share of the available support in accordance with the reforms that are carried out.</p> <p>3.6. (...) The Commission needs to set clear and objective rules for selecting the reforms to be financed from the European Union budget, while making sure that all</p>	<p>According to Article 7 of the Structural Reform Support Programme Regulation, a request for support may be submitted by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Member States undertaking reforms at their own initiative; b) Member States implementing economic adjustment programmes, which receive Union financial assistance by other instruments and, c) Member States implementing growth-sustaining reforms related to the country-specific recommendation in the context of the European Semester. <p>The criteria for the selection of requests for support are spelled out in the Structural Reform Support Programme Regulation (cf. Article 7(2)) and remain unchanged in the current amendment proposal.</p>

<p>Member States have equal access to the funds. Furthermore, the reforms that are put up for financing should be in line with the European Union strategy and strictly monitored through the European Semester.</p> <p>3.7. (...) Given that Member States already have their own reform initiatives, the European Economic and Social Committee recommends that the Structural Reform Support Programme should focus on the measures that will best support the country-specific recommendations.</p> <p>3.11. (...) Considering the Treaty obligation incumbent on almost all Member States to join the euro, the European Economic and Social Committee recommends that special attention should be given to reforms aimed at expanding the eurozone and, if possible, additional funding should be allocated for these objectives.</p>	<p>The purpose of the Commission proposal to amend the Structural Reform Support Programme Regulation is to increase the budget and also to create a dedicated work stream to support the implementation of reforms and policies, which will help Member States whose currency is not the euro to prepare for a successful participation in the euro area.</p>
<p>1.6. (...) The European Economic and Social Committee highlights that the increase of the financial envelope of the Structural Reform Support Programme must take place without penalising the budgets of other equally important funds.</p> <p>3.4. (...) The European Economic and Social Committee recommends that the increase of the financial envelope of the Structural Reform Support Programme must take place without jeopardising the budgets of other equally important funds.</p>	<p>For the increase in the Structural Reform Support Programme budget envelope, the Commission proposes to mobilise the Flexibility Instrument, which is a special instrument allowing the use of appropriations over and above the ceilings available for the Multiannual Financial Framework budget headings. The increase is not made at the expense of other Union funds and programmes.</p>
<p>1.9. The European Economic and Social Committee suggests introducing a rule whereby no financing should be given to a Member State unless they have fully adopted the application of the Partnership principle with a real involvement of the social partners</p>	<p>The Commission supports the involvement of economic and social partners and of the regional and local authorities in the reform process, also in the context of the Structural Reform Support Programme, recognising their</p>

<p>and civil society when deciding on the multiannual reform commitment packages⁴. The Partnership principle application is paramount for ensuring the delivery of evidence-based reforms, connected to the real-life situation in the economies of each Member State.</p> <p>3.1. (...) The European Economic and Social Committee reiterates that it is essential that the Member States ensure the application of the Partnership principle and the real involvement of the social partners and organised civil society when deciding on the structural reform strategy they want to promote, as well as during the monitoring process through the European Semester. In order to ensure that genuine application of the principle takes place in all Member States, the European Economic and Social Committee suggests introducing a rule whereby no funds should be allocated unless they have fully involved organised civil society when deciding on the multiannual reform commitment packages.</p>	<p>role in the preparation and implementation of reforms.</p> <p>The engagement of social partners and civil society in the reform process is a key factor to the success of reforms. Such involvement should be achieved in accordance with the institutional framework and processes, as well as with the legal set-up in place in each Member State.</p> <p>The Structural Reform Support Programme Regulation provides that the request for support may be submitted to the Commission by a Member State, i.e. by the central government authorities. This is done in order to allow an adequate steer, overview and coordination of the requests for support (also in the ensuing implementing phase) by the potential beneficiary Member State as a whole.</p> <p>This means that authorities at regional and local levels should be able to feed their needs upstream to the central government authorities, who will be the interlocutors of the Commission for the purpose of the Structural Reform Support Programme implementation. This needs to be implemented in accordance with the institutional and legal set-up of each Member State.</p> <p>Regional and local authorities can also be recipients of support under the Structural Reform Support Programme and several support actions are already ongoing to the benefit of the regional and/or local levels.</p>
<p>1.10. The European Economic and Social</p>	<p>On 31 May 2018, the Commission</p>

⁴ OJ L 74, 14.3.2014, p. 1–7.

<p>Committee endorses the intention to provide the new reform tool with its own dedicated financing mechanism in the post-2020 multiannual framework.</p> <p>1..11. The European Economic and Social Committee recommends that on a case by case basis, certain Structural Reform Support Programme reforms should be funded and linked with the new reform delivery tool, especially when it comes to joining the eurozone or reforms that could further increase European integration.</p> <p>4.5. The European Economic and Social Committee endorses the temporary solution for financing the pilot phase of the new reform delivery tool through the performance reserve. This proposal should not interfere with existing European Structural and Investment Funds, but rather have a dedicated separate budget.</p> <p>4.7. Given that the new reform delivery tool would complement the voluntary technical support provided via the Structural Reform Support Programme, the European Economic and Social Committee recommends that on a case-by-case basis, certain reforms should be funded and linked with the new reform delivery tool, especially when it comes to joining the eurozone or reforms that could further increase European integration.</p>	<p>proposed to establish a new Reform Support Programme made up of three separate and complementary instruments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the reform delivery tool which will provide financial support to Member States to implement structural reforms identified in the context of the European Semester of economic policy coordination; - the technical support instrument which will succeed the existing Structural Reform Support Programme, to provide, upon request from Member States, tailor-made technical support for the implementation of institutional, administrative and growth-sustaining structural reforms; - the convergence facility which will provide dedicated financial and technical support to Member States wishing to join the euro area and which have taken demonstrable steps towards adopting the single currency within a given time-frame.
--	---

N°3 Mid-term evaluation of the Copernicus programme (2014-2020)
COM(2017) 617 final
EESC 2017/6089 - INT/837
533rd Plenary Session – March 2018
Rapporteur: Mr Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (GR11-IT)
DG GROW –Commissioner BIENKOWSKA

**Points of the European Economic and
Social Committee opinion considered
essential**

European Commission position

The follow-up given by the Commission to this opinion will be included in a subsequent report.

<p>N°4 Intellectual property package COM(2017) 707 final, COM(2017) 708 final, COM(2017) 712 final EESC 2017/6184 - INT/840 533rd Plenary Session – March 2018 Rapporteur: Ms Franca SALIS-MADINIER (GR11-IT) DG GROW –Commissioner BIEŃKOWSKA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>The follow-up given by the Commission to this opinion will be included in a subsequent report.</p>	

<p>N°5 Tackling Illegal Content Online - Towards an enhanced responsibility of online platforms COM(2017) 555 final EESC 2017/5365 - INT/836 533rd Plenary Session – March 2018 Rapporteur: Mr Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (GRIII-ES) DG CNECT – Commissioner GABRIEL</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.5. The European Economic and Social Committee strongly welcomes the Commission’s initiative in presenting this Communication which, in general, provides a sound approach to tackling the presence of illegal content on online platforms.</p>	<p>The Commission thanks the Committee for its strong support to the Communication. Furthermore, it stresses that many of the comments and suggestions made by the study group during the preparation of the opinion have been duly incorporated in the Recommendation of 1 March 2018 on measures to effectively tackle illegal content online⁵. In what follows, the Commission’s explanations also take into account the recommendation. An Impact Assessment process is ongoing, examining the need for any further measures⁶.</p>
<p>1.4. Attention should be paid in particular to the effectiveness of actions taken in relation to those online platforms whose headquarters are located outside European Union territory.</p>	<p>The Commission fully agrees with the Committee in this regard. The recent Recommendation relates to the activities of all hosting service providers, irrespective of whether they are established in the Union or in a third country, provided that they direct their activities to consumers residing in the Union (Recital 15 and point 4(a)).</p>

⁵ C(2018) 1177 final.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/ares-2018-1183598_en

<p>1.4., 3.2. and 3.5. The Commission should review and catalogue illegal content to the extent that this is possible, so that other forms of content that are not specifically mentioned in the Communication can be incorporated.</p>	<p>The Commission would like to stress that the types of illegal content mentioned in the Communication are not an exhaustive list, but only given as a way of example or naming those that gain more political attention. In the Recommendation, the Commission clarified that 'illegal content' means any information which is not in compliance with Union law or the law of a Member State concerned (point 4(b)).</p>
<p>3.3. The European Economic and Social Committee is in favour of strengthening measures to combat illegal online content, in particular as regards the protection of minors, and the removal of content related to hate speech and incitement to terrorism. It therefore requests that the need to avoid harassment and violence against vulnerable people be taken into consideration.</p>	<p>The Commission fully agrees that particular attention has to be given to the protection of minors and the removal of content related to hate speech and incitement to terrorism.</p> <p>The revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive⁷ strengthens the rules against hate speech and public provocation to commit terrorist offences. It also introduces a requirement for video-sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube) to protect minors from harmful content and people against incitement to violence or hatred, as well as from content constituting criminal offences.</p> <p>The Commission is involved in a number of cooperation mechanisms with the private sector to combat these specific types of content, such as the European Union internet forum tackling terrorist content online and the Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online, with positive results. In addition, the Commission is currently carrying out an Impact Assessment⁸, exploring the need for further initiatives</p>

⁷ COM(2016) 287 final.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/ares-2018-1183598_en

	with regard to illegal online content.
<p>1.5. and 4.1. Consideration should be given to the possibility of reviewing the content of the e-Commerce Directive⁹, the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive¹⁰ and the Directive on Misleading and Comparative Advertising¹¹, on the basis, inter alia, of standards that are valid for the future, technologically neutral and vital to the development of European platforms, so as not to spread uncertainty among economic agents or limit access to digital services.</p>	<p>As regards the consumer protection acquis, the Commission has recently adopted the New Deal for Consumers¹² which, among others, will bring consumer protection rules up to speed with the digital age and strengthen consumer rights online through greater transparency in online market places and on search results on online platforms.</p> <p>As regards the e-Commerce Directive, the Commission has already stated in the 2016 Communication on Online Platforms¹³ that it will maintain a balanced and predictable liability regime for online platforms. The Commission's view is that even within the boundaries set by the Directive, the fight against illegal content can be made significantly more effective.</p>
<p>3.4. The importance of taking action against the dissemination of fake news should be highlighted, which is why the</p>	<p>After the High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation submitted its final report on 12 March</p>

⁹ Directive 2000/31/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market ('Directive on electronic commerce'), OJ L 178, 17.7.2000.

¹⁰ Directive 2005/29/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2005 concerning unfair business-to-consumer commercial practices in the internal market and amending Council Directive 84/450/EEC, Directives 97/7/EC, 98/27/EC and 2002/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Regulation (EC) No 2006/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council ('Unfair Commercial Practices Directive') (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 149, 11.6.2005.

¹¹ Directive 2006/114/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 concerning misleading and comparative advertising (codified version) (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 376, 27.12.2006.

¹² http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3041_en.htm; https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/consumers/review-eu-consumer-law-new-deal-consumers_en

¹³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0288>

<p>European Economic and Social Committee feels that online platforms should provide users with the tools to report fake news, so that other users can be made aware that the veracity of the content has been called into question.</p>	<p>2018, the Commission adopted a Communication on tackling online disinformation¹⁴ which outlines and suggests measures by stakeholders, Member States and the Commission to tackle this phenomenon. Among other things, the Commission will convene a multi-stakeholder forum on disinformation which will be responsible for developing a Union-wide Code of Practice on Disinformation. Under this Code, online platforms can commit to achieve a number of objectives, including providing users with easily accessible tools to report disinformation. The Commission will also support the creation of an independent European network of fact-checkers to establish common working methods, exchange best practices, achieve the broadest possible coverage across the European Union, and participate in joint fact-checking and related activities. The network will be invited to participate in the multi-stakeholder forum on disinformation.</p>
<p>3.4. Online platforms could develop partnerships with trusted flaggers, i.e. certified fact-checking sites in order to enhance their users trust in the validity of the online content.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that in order to facilitate this privileged channel of cooperation, hosting service providers should be encouraged to publish clear and objective conditions for determining which individuals or entities they consider as trusted flaggers. Trusted flaggers should carry out their activities in a diligent and objective manner, based on respect for the values on which the Union is founded (points 26 and 27 of the Recommendation).</p>

¹⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach COM(2018) 236 final

<p>4.3. Lists could be drawn up of those online platforms that harbour illegal content, as well as those developing best practices which have official recognition. This would help increase competition for the best reputation and improve trust in the internet.</p>	<p>In the field of intellectual property rights connected to trade, the Commission carried out, in the first quarter of 2018, a public consultation on a future “Counterfeit and Piracy watch-List”¹⁵. The purpose of the watch-list is to identify online and physical marketplaces that engage in or facilitate intellectual property rights infringement, in particular counterfeiting and piracy. The publication of the list is foreseen for the end of 2018.</p>
<p>4.3. Reaffirming that a balance must be found between upholding fundamental rights and restricting illegal content, the European Economic and Social Committee stresses that the use of current automated filter technology places a disproportionate burden on the freedom of intermediaries to conduct their business, the right of end-users to the freedom of expression and the right to protection of personal data. One-size-fits-all solutions, such as automatic re-upload filters, should not be forced upon the industry without considering the specific needs of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Information Technology sector.</p> <p>Current best practices of automated filter technology indicate that the systematic application of the human in-the-loop principle is necessary. This is a system in which final contextualized decisions on a smaller number of contestable cases are always made by humans in order to decrease the likelihood of infringing the fundamental right to freedom of expression. It should be made clear that Artificial</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that a balance must be found between upholding fundamental rights and restricting illegal content. The Communication and the Recommendation encourage the use of automatic recognition technologies where appropriate, but do not impose them. At the same time, both documents also encourage larger service providers to cooperate and share their experiences, technological solutions and best practices to tackle illegal content online with smaller hosting service providers which, because of their size or the scale on which they operate, have limited resources and expertise, including in the context of ongoing cooperation between hosting service providers through memoranda of understanding and other voluntary arrangements (point 28 of the Recommendation).</p> <p>The Commission also stresses that, where automated means are used, effective and appropriate safeguards should be provided to ensure that decisions taken concerning that content</p>

¹⁵ <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1786>

<p>Intelligence must not replace decisions taken by human beings on the basis of ethical assessments.</p>	<p>are accurate and well-founded. Such safeguards should consist, in particular, of human oversight and verifications where appropriate and, in any event, where a detailed assessment of the relevant context is required in order to determine whether or not the content is to be considered illegal content (point 20).</p> <p>Finally, in order to avoid that filters delete legal content, the “put-back mechanism” (counter-notice) should also apply when this content has been deleted by the service provider, for instance through automated means (point 9).</p>
<p>4.6. Provision should be made for cases where decisions need to be revised, so as to ensure that they can then be reversed and any content that was deleted in error or reported for malicious reasons can be restored, including in particular out-of-court claims systems, with a code of conduct that sets out penalties in the case of non-compliance.</p> <p>The European Economic and Social Committee calls for effective systems to be put in place for complaint procedures and dispute resolution, thus simplifying the way small and medium-sized enterprises and consumers can exercise their rights.</p>	<p>The Commission fully agrees that there is a need to ensure that illegal content is taken down whilst avoiding that legal content is deleted unintentionally. With this purpose in mind, the Recommendation also provides for counter-notices procedures (points 9-13) and out-of-court dispute settlement (points 14-15), as well as a call for hosting service providers to act with due diligence to avoid the removal of content which is not illegal.</p> <p>As regards complaint procedures for small and medium-sized enterprises, the Commission has recently tabled a proposal of a Regulation promoting fairness and transparency for business users of online intermediation services¹⁶, where particular measures on platforms’ internal complaint-handling systems are proposed.</p>

¹⁶ Proposal for a Regulation on promoting fairness and transparency for business users of online intermediation services (COM(2018) 238 final / 2018/0112 (COD))

<p>4.7. As regards the withdrawal of illegal content, the effectiveness of the proposals should be increased by introducing a clearly dissuasive element such as the public disclosure of the measures adopted in the framework of the corresponding legal certainty, as this would also strengthen the standards of transparency, which is a necessary condition for the successful, effective implementation of any legislative proposal. [...] It is important to promote the transparency of the system.</p>	<p>The need for greater transparency is one of the main elements singled out in the Recommendation (in particular points 16-17); as announced in the recent Inception Impact Assessment, the Commission will analyse the need for, inter alia, further measures to increase transparency of the removal of illegal content online.</p>
--	--

<p>N°6 Completing the Banking Union (communication) COM(2017) 592 final EESC 2017/5496 - ECO/443 533rd Plenary Session - March 2018 Rapporteur: Mr Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (GR III-ES) DG FISMA – Vice-President DOMBROVSKIS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee supports the measures adopted since 2012 which have made a decisive contribution to financial stability and broken the doom loop between banking systems and their sovereigns.</p> <p>1.2 The European Economic and Social Committee therefore welcomes – and also calls for the concrete implementation of – the new set of measures proposed by the European Commission to complete the Economic and Monetary Union and move towards an optimal monetary zone, overcoming the current resistance and achieving as soon as possible a greater precision for the completion of the third pillar of the Banking Union, through the progressive reduction and mutualisation of financial risks. Indeed, the completion of the Banking Union – and of the Capital Markets Union – should make it possible to fully establish the Financial Union, one of the fundamental pillars of the Economic and Monetary Union.</p> <p>1.3 More specifically, the European Economic and Social Committee supports the various proposed goals for reinforcing the Single Supervisory Mechanism and the Single Resolution Mechanism, for</p>	<p>The Commission thanks the Committee for its support to the measures and goals included in the Communication.</p>

<p>facilitating the gradual reduction of financial risks and finally giving way to a pan-European deposit guarantee system that, in addition to guaranteeing liquidity, can assume losses and complete the third pillar of the banking union.</p>	
<p>3.8. It is also necessary to be as clear as possible about the conditions that will apply both during and after the transition to the co-insurance phase, in which both liquidity coverage and loss coverage will be provided. The proposal to build this up gradually is a good one, but at the same time there is some concern that the current text is still too general and too vague, and leaves too much room for different interpretations and discussions. There is a need to have more guidance and certainty on this subject right from the start.</p>	<p>It is true that the Communication does not exhaustively address some elements (e.g. on loss coverage in the second phase). The Communication aims to give new impetus to the negotiations on the European Deposit Insurance Scheme by offering possible compromise ideas for issues where no agreement could be reached yet. If the co-legislators converge on these ideas, the Commission stands ready to flesh them out in more detail. This would also include the treatment of Institutional Protection Schemes under the European Deposit Insurance Scheme.</p>
<p>4.6. Likewise, the European Economic and Social Committee recommends that capital requirements for banking obtain more favourable treatment for investments in the green economy and consider the application of capital surcharges for investments in the "brown" economy. The Single Supervisory Mechanism should exercise specific supervision in this matter.</p>	<p>In the Commission's view, different options are available to favour investments in the green economy either by using capital discounts for "green" investments or capital surcharges in the "brown" economy. Following the proposal by Member of the European Parliament Peter Simon, the Commission will explore the feasibility of a so-called "green supporting factor" which would amend capital charges for banks to boost 'green' investments.</p> <p>As regards supervisory issues, the Commission would recommend to mention the involvement of the European Banking Authority (e.g. in the context of possible guidance or the</p>

	performance of stress tests).
--	-------------------------------

<p>N°7 Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2019-2020) complementing the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation COM(2017) 698 final EESC 2017/6223 - INT/842 533rd Plenary Session – March 2018 Rapporteur: Mr Jacques LEMERCIER (GRII-FR) DG RTD – Commissioner MOEDAS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>Overall assessment</p>	<p>The Commission takes note that the European Economic and Social Committee welcomes the proposal and emphasises the fact that the Euratom research programme offers significant European added value. The general comments made by the Committee reiterate the main conclusions of the Commission’s Report on the interim evaluation of the Euratom research and training programme 2014-2018¹⁷. The Commission welcomes the EESC opinion on the need to enhance the safety of nuclear technologies and in particular to maintain nuclear expertise and skills.</p>
<p>1.6 Following numerous incidents in European power stations, it has now been demonstrated that subcontracting is an element of insecurity in the maintenance of nuclear power stations. The European Economic and Social Committee is of the view that limits should be placed on subcontracting and that it should be strictly</p>	<p>Council Directive 2014/87/Euratom amending the Directive 2009/71/Euratom establishing a Community framework for the nuclear safety of nuclear installations¹⁸ addresses the issue of contractors and sub-contractors, insofar as their activity might affect the nuclear safety of a</p>

¹⁷ COM(2017) 697 final.

¹⁸ Council Directive 2014/87/Euratom of 8 July 2014 amending Directive 2009/71/Euratom establishing a Community framework for the nuclear safety of nuclear installations, OJ L 219, 25.7.2014.

regulated.

nuclear installation. Several new provisions have been introduced, such as the responsibility of licence holders for the activities of contractors and sub-contractors, as well as the licensees' obligation to ensure that they have the necessary human resources with appropriate qualifications and competences to fulfil their obligations. The Commission is monitoring the effective transposition and implementation of these new provisions. The issue was likewise flagged as important in the 2015 Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the implementation of the 2009 Nuclear Safety Directive¹⁹.

¹⁹ COM(2015) 573 final.

<p>N°8 Value Added Tax (VAT) Reform Package (I) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee on the follow-up to the Action Plan on VAT – Towards a single EU VAT area – Time to act - COM (2017) 566 final Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EU) No 904/2010 as regards the certified taxable person - COM(2017) 567 final - 2017/0248 (CNS) Proposal for a Council Implementing Regulation amending Implementing Regulation (EU) No 282/2011 as regards certain exemptions for intra-Community transactions - COM(2017) 568 final - 2017/0249 (NLE) Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 2006/112/EC as regards harmonising and simplifying certain rules in the value added tax system and introducing the definitive system for the taxation of trade between Member States - COM(2017) 569 final - 2017/0251 (CNS) EESC 2017/5392 - ECO/442 533rd Plenary Session - March 2018 Rapporteur: Mr Giuseppe GUERINI (GRIII-IT) Corapporteur: Mr Krister ANDERSSON (GRI-SE) DG TAXUD – Commissioner MOSCOVICI</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.1. The European Economic and Social Committee considers that the current European Union Value Added Tax system is highly fragmented and complex and subsequently reduces and distorts trade and investment by creating unnecessary and extensive administrative burdens and trade barriers for businesses.</p>	<p>The Commission has taken these elements into consideration when presenting its proposals²⁰ on the so-called definitive Value Added Tax system.</p>
<p>1.3. The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes the Commission’s determination to close the Value Added Tax gap and the involvement of the European</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee’s broad support for the aim of tackling Value Added Tax fraud.</p>

²⁰ COM(2017) 569 final; COM(2017) 568 final; COM(2017) 567 final.

Public Prosecutor's Office in cases of Value Added Tax fraud above EUR 10 million.	
1.5. The European Economic and Social Committee believes that a functioning one-stop-shop is a vital part of a destination-based system. The Commission's initiatives, such as the proposed extension of the Mini One-Stop-Shop to all Business-to-Consumer services as well as Business-to-Consumer sales of goods, both intra-Community and from outside the Community, is therefore welcome.	The Commission welcomes the Committee's support for the extension of the one-stop-shop system.
1.6. The European Economic and Social Committee calls on all the institutions involved in the process of reforming the Value Added Tax system to explore how a common system for both services and goods can be rolled out as quickly as possible.	The Commission welcomes the Committee's call to all institutions for a quick roll-out of the new Value Added Tax system and, from its side, stands ready to start the negotiations on the different proposals at once.
1.8. The European Economic and Social Committee notes that with regard to the certified taxable person, the Commission deems this concept to be important for the transition towards a Value Added Tax system based on the destination principle and agrees that businesses whose tax reliability is proven should be able to benefit from appropriate simplification measures.	The Commission welcomes the Committee's support for the certified taxable person concept.
1.10. With reference to certain exemptions for intra-Community transactions included in the proposal amending Council Implementing Regulation (EU) No 282/2011 ²¹ , the European Economic and Social Committee notes that the Council's request to the Commission to simplify and clarify the legal framework on exemptions appears to be a useful tool for reducing fraud and limiting compliance costs for small and	The Commission welcomes the Committee's support for the Commission's approach in clarifying the legal framework for the exemption of 'intra-Community supplies' within the Value Added Tax system.

²¹ Council Implementing Regulation (EU) No 282/2011 of 15 March 2011 laying down implementing measures for Directive 2006/112/EC on the common system of value added tax, OJ L 77, 23.3.2011.

medium-sized enterprises.	
---------------------------	--

<p>N°9 Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States COM(2017) 677 final EESC 2017/0759 - SOC/558 533rd Plenary Session - March 2018 Rapporteur: Mr Michael McLOUGHLIN (GRIII-IE) DG EMPL - Vice-President DOMBROVSKIS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.1. Conclusions and recommendations - The European Economic and Social Committee believes more could be done in the guidelines to truly fulfil the promise of the Pillar.</p>	<p>The Employment Guidelines, being fully aligned with the Pillar principles, are just one of many tools used to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights.</p> <p>Already today, the European Pillar of Social Rights is flanked by a number of further concrete legislative and non-legislative initiatives such as on work-life balance of parents and carers, transparency and predictability of working conditions, access to social protection or working time.</p>
<p>5.1. (Guideline 5) While new forms of work and innovation provide opportunities for growth, they may also have a harmful impact on people if they translate into more precarious work.</p>	<p>In December 2017, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions²². It aims to set new rights for all workers, particularly addressing insufficient protection for workers in more precarious jobs, while limiting burdens on employers and maintaining labour market adaptability. It aims to ensure that these rights cover all workers in all forms of work, including those in the most flexible non-standard and new forms of work such as zero-hour contracts, casual work,</p>

²² COM(2017) 797 final.

	<p>domestic work, voucher-based work or platform work.</p> <p>It also comes with targeted provisions on enforcement, to make sure that workers in the workplace effectively benefit from these rights.</p> <p>On 13 March 2018, the Commission adopted the Social Fairness Package²³, which includes a proposal for a Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed. As the world of work evolves due to new work patterns, business practices and digitisation, social protection systems constantly need to match new realities. Today, almost 40% of people employed are either in an atypical employment situation or self-employed. Such persons are not always well covered in terms of social security. In line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, this proposal aims to set a direction for Member States to support adequate access to social protection for all workers and the self-employed, in particular for those who, due to their employment status, are not sufficiently covered by social security schemes.</p>
<p>5.8. Guideline 7 contains improved language on precarious working conditions and flexible working. This is particularly the case when referring to "preserving appropriate security and healthy, safe and well-adapted working environments". However, the provisions on "an environment for recruitment" should not be used to reduce labour law protection.</p>	<p>In its Employment Guidelines, the Commission fully recognises that employment protection rules, labour law and institutions should preserve appropriate security and healthy, safe and well-adapted working environments for workers whilst providing both a suitable environment for recruitment, and the necessary flexibility for employers to adapt swiftly to changes in the economic context; therefore the Committee's</p>

²³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/com-2018-131_en

	concerns are addressed by the Commission.
5.12. (Guideline 7) It would be important to maintain a focus on youth unemployment even as the figures improve, as often structural reform is needed to ensure this is not the first group to suffer if another shock occurs.	The Commission notes the Committee's focus on youth unemployment even as the figures improve. This is also the reason why the Commission focuses very much in Guideline 6 on youth unemployment and the issue of young people not in employment, education or training, which should continue to be addressed, through prevention of early school leaving and structural improvement in the school-to-work transition, including through the full implementation of the Youth Guarantee ²⁴ .
5.13. (Guideline 8) As is often the case, the long-term unemployed can take the longest to reintegrate as the labour market position improves. Specific measures for this, such as flexible labour market-relevant training and one to one employment guidance services, will be needed.	The Commission takes note of the Committee's opinion and would like to recall and clarify that, in Guideline 6, the emphasis is very much on comprehensive strategies that include in-depth individual assessment at the latest after 18 months of unemployment, which should be pursued with a view to significantly reducing and preventing long-term and structural unemployment. This is in line with the Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed in the labour market ²⁵ and reflects Principle 4 of the Pillar on active support on employment.
5.20. (Guideline 8) The European Economic and Social Committee does not support automatic adjustment mechanisms for retirement age, based either on longer life expectancy or demographic change.	The Commission does not share the Committee's view on pension systems. The Commission feels its proposal in this respect remains entirely within a well-established Union policy. Moreover, in a number of Member States, linking the statutory retirement age to life expectancy is already a feature of the

²⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>

²⁵ Council recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market, OJ C 67, 20.2.2016.

pension system. This is the case for 10 Member States that in total have introduced such a norm (Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Finland, Portugal, Greece, the Netherlands, Cyprus, Slovakia, United Kingdom). This approach presents an effective tool for increasing sustainability in public pension systems.

Furthermore, by increasing statutory retirement ages, people can accrue more pension rights and thus a higher pension when labour markets provide for working longer. There is thus also a positive effect on pension adequacy.

<p>N°10 A socially sustainable concept for raising living standards, boosting growth and employment, as well as citizens' security in the digital era (exploratory opinion) EESC 2017/5563 - SOC/568 533rd Plenary Session - March 2018 Rapporteur: Ms Giulia BARBUCCI (GR11-IT) DG EMPL –Commissioner THYSSEN</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>Social Pillar, inequality, social protection, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals</p>	
<p>1.2. The European Economic and Social Committee recommends that the institutions conduct an evaluation of the instruments in place and new ones (starting with the Scoreboard appended to the Pillar) and verify how effective they are, the aim being to measure more accurately how the proposed policies impact people.</p> <p>2.10. The European Economic and Social Committee considers that the institutions will also have the task of evaluating the instruments already in place and new ones (like the Scoreboard accompanying the European Pillar) and verifying how effective they are, the aim being to measure with some accuracy the impact of the proposed policies on social rights on the public.</p>	<p>The Social Scoreboard, presented in April 2017²⁶, tracks trends and performance across Member States, and its analyses feed into the European Semester. In addition, benchmarking in various policy areas - such as unemployment benefits, active labour market policies and minimum incomes - will also support convergence in the European Union. Furthermore, the depth and scope of the country-specific analysis in the Country Reports was further strengthened including through a greater use of simulations of the impact of reforms on the level of income inequality and on poverty.</p>
<p>2.3. The institutions therefore have to act at all levels, in cooperation with the social partners and organised civil society, in order to put forward policies based on</p>	<p>The Commission has a cross-cutting social policy agenda, with the clear ambition of promoting fairness and</p>

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-scoreboard-2018-country-reports_en.pdf

<p>measures to overcome these imbalances and inequalities, mainly through more employment on the basis of sustained and more inclusive growth.</p>	<p>sustainable and inclusive growth.</p> <p>The European Pillar of Social Rights²⁷ aims at fostering upward convergence by creating a reference framework for employment and social policies on the basis of 20 key principles.</p> <p>The European Semester will be a key instrument in monitoring progress on the Pillar implementation.</p>
<p>2.6. Neither the institutions nor the social partners should oppose competitiveness to sustainability. In fact, it has been demonstrated, for example, that the more advanced firms in terms of sustainability are likely to be more competitive internationally. Furthermore, the European Union should guide the process of globalisation in the direction of bringing about sustainable development that works to the advantage of both businesses and workers.</p>	<p>The European Union's strategy is aimed towards achieving sustainable and inclusive growth. This objective applies to both its internal growth strategy as well as to its approach on development, as reflected, inter alia, in its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>In line with a well-functioning social market economy, growth conducive and properly sequenced structural reforms can contribute to stronger social outcomes and more equality, as well as increased competitiveness, paving the way for sustainable and inclusive growth.</p> <p>The implementation of the Pillar requires support and actions of all involved actors to achieve concrete results. Guideline 7 of the Employment Guidelines²⁸ on "Enhancing the functioning of labour markets" refers to that.</p>
<p>2.8. Implementing the 2030 Global Agenda calls for strong engagement on the part of all components of society: institutions, organised civil society and the</p>	<p>The Commission Communication on "Next steps for a sustainable European Future"²⁹ highlighted that the European Union will be a frontrunner in</p>

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en

²⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2018-european-semester-employment-guidelines_en

²⁹ COM(2016) 739 final.

<p>world of research and universities, as well as effective evaluation measures.</p>	<p>implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, together with Member States, in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity.</p> <p>There are several Sustainable Development Goals in the employment and social area which relate strongly to the European Pillar of Social Rights.</p> <p>The Commission has established a multi-stakeholder platform in order to follow up and exchange best practice on Sustainable Development Goals implementation.</p> <p>The Commission is preparing a further Reflection Paper, “Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030”, on the follow-up to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, reflecting on the key importance of employment and social areas in the Agenda 2030.</p>
<p>1.3. and 3.4. The European Economic and Social Committee supports the European Parliament’s recommendation that the Commission and social partners should work together to present a proposal for a framework directive on decent working conditions in all forms of employment, extending existing minimum standards to new forms of employment relationships.</p>	<p>In December 2017, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions³⁰. It aims to set new rights for all workers, particularly addressing insufficient protection for workers in more precarious jobs, while limiting burdens on employers and maintaining labour market adaptability. It aims to ensure that these rights cover all workers in all forms of work, including those in the most flexible non-standard and new forms of work such as zero-hour contracts, casual work, domestic work,</p>

³⁰ COM(2017) 797 final.

	<p>voucher-based work or platform work.</p> <p>On 13 March 2018, the Commission adopted the Social Fairness Package³¹, which includes a proposal for a European Labour Authority and a proposal for a Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed</p>
<p>Youth, long term unemployed, transitions</p>	
<p>1.7. The European Economic and Social Committee calls on European and national institutions to secure the appropriate resources to facilitate and speed up transitions and to guarantee continuity of income in an adequate manner, particularly for the most disadvantaged.</p> <p>3.8. The European Economic and Social Committee recommends that the European Union Institutions and national governments introduce all possible initiatives to increase the quantity and quality of jobs for young people, support youth mobility, ensure decent social security prospects and promote life-long education and training at all levels. Initiatives such as Erasmus+, the Youth Guarantee and all the other measures contained in the Youth Employment Initiative must be properly funded and implemented.</p>	<p>The Youth Guarantee³², reaffirmed by the European Pillar of Social Rights, has given opportunities to more than 3.5 million young people each year since its start. The Youth Employment Initiative supported the implementation of the Youth Guarantee with a budget of EUR 8.8 billion during 2014-2020, already reaching 1.7 million young people. Moreover, measures implemented by the Member States with the support of the European Social Fund contribute to youth employment and employability.</p> <p>Your first EURES Job (YfEJ) is an intra-European Union job mobility scheme to help young people find a work placement in a different country other than their country of residence. It also assists employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to find the workers they need for their hard-to-fill vacancies.</p> <p>Moreover, the Commission proposed to more than double the overall budget of the future Erasmus programme with a view to raising the number of potential beneficiaries to 12 million people,</p>

³¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/com-2018-131_en

³² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>

	<p>which is three times more than under the current programme. The programme promotes high-quality life-long learning education and training at all levels and gives valuable mobility opportunities to students, pupils, learners in vocational education and training, apprentices, young people in general as well as educational staff, trainers and youth workers.</p>
<p>Gender equality, Work Life Balance</p>	
<p>1.8. and 3.11. The European Economic and Social Committee urges the institutions at all levels, the social partners and organised civil society to coordinate in introducing measures to ensure equal treatment of men and women in all spheres of society.</p>	<p>The Commission will implement the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019³³, which sets out the main priorities in this area, with reference to existing tools such as the European Semester, the Union Funds and European Union legislation.</p> <p>The Commission has launched the initiative 'New start to support Work-Life Balance for parents and carers'. Its proposals aim to increase the uptake of parental leave amongst both women and men; to introduce paternity leave and carers' leave; to promote flexible working; to provide more and better child and other care facilities; and to remove the disincentives discouraging second-earners, often women, from entering the labour market.</p>
<p>Lifelong learning, digital skills</p>	
<p>1.9. The European Economic and Social Committee recommends that decision makers consider measures aimed at reducing the skills deficit in key areas of the digital economy as they are essential for excellence</p>	<p>The right to life-long learning was proclaimed in the European Pillar of Social Rights, as part of the first Principle.</p> <p>Digital skills are one of the key</p>

<p>and to increase European competitiveness. It is also essential to provide digital literacy training for anyone at risk of being excluded, as a result of digitalisation, from exercising their rights and accessing the social services – particularly the fundamental ones – and would urge the social partners and the institutions, in cooperation with organised civil society, to introduce prompt measures to this end. It is a task of the public authorities at all levels to guarantee that a proper digital infrastructure is available and leads to increased inclusion in order to overcome possible disparities between territories and environments.</p> <p>3.5. The European Union should promote actions in terms of early childhood education and life-long training, in particular on digital skills, to address the skills mismatch.</p>	<p>competences, which the Commission considers necessary for life-long learning. The Council adopted a revised Recommendation on Key Competences on 22 May 2018³⁴. The Recommendation encourages these competences, including digital literacy, at all levels of education and training and for people of all ages.</p> <p>The Commission has developed the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp)³⁵, a reference framework that describes what it means to be digitally competent in all aspects of life. DigComp can be used across sectors, disciplines and systems to enable people to develop digital competences. DigComp maps out the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to effectively use digital technologies in a critical, collaborative and creative way.</p> <p>The European Commission also put forward a Digital Education Action Plan³⁶, which includes 11 actions to support technology-use and digital competence development in education to support Member States in their efforts towards digitalisation and innovation in education.</p>
<p>3.14. In the digital era it is essential to guarantee access to the internet, provide digital literacy training for anyone at risk of unemployment, and to provide the opportunity for them to exercise their rights and access the social services – particularly</p>	<p>The Council adopted the 'Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults' Recommendation in December 2016³⁷. The Commission is now working with Member States and other interested parties to implement the</p>

³⁴ 2018/C 189/01

³⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1315&langId=en>

³⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A22%3AFIN>

³⁷ Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, OJ C 484, 24.12.2016.

the fundamental ones. The European Economic and Social Committee would urge the social partners and the institutions, in cooperation with organised civil society, to act promptly to introduce measures to this end.

Recommendation, helping low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards an upper secondary qualification or equivalent.

The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition³⁸, established as one of the actions of the Skills Agenda for Europe, brings together Member States, companies, social partners, non-profit organisations and education providers, who take action to tackle the issue of digital skills for all – developing digital skills to enable all citizens to be active in our digital society.

All organisations who take action to boost digital skills in Europe can become members of the Coalition by endorsing the objectives and principles of the Coalition as laid out in the Members' Charter. They can also pledge to take action to carry out initiatives to tackle the digital skills gap. Actions range from training unemployed people, giving access to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for teachers, providing coding classes for children, to cutting edge training for Information and Communications Technology specialists.

The Commission also proposed a revision of the Europass Decision, as part of the Skills Agenda³⁹. The new Decision was recently adopted by the Parliament and Council and work will begin on implementing a new Europass platform which is fully accessible, including for persons with disabilities,

³⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-skills-jobs-coalition>

³⁹ COM(2016) 625 final.

	and free to all users.
Disability	
<p>3.7. The European Union should capitalise on the many opportunities that exist for people with disabilities to promote their employability and access decent employment, which would also enable them to contribute to the social security systems. The European Economic and Social Committee therefore recommends creating the prerequisites for a more active use of tools for life-long training and re-qualification of people with disabilities in the new digital professions.</p>	<p>Equality of opportunity for people with disabilities is at the centre of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020⁴⁰.</p> <p>Regarding digital transformation, the Commission is fully committed to promoting the accessibility of digital products, services and information for all citizens, including persons with disabilities. In this respect, the Web-Accessibility Directive⁴¹ and the proposal for a European Accessibility Act⁴² are examples of initiatives aiming at improving digital access for persons with disabilities.</p> <p>By 2020, the Commission will undertake an evaluation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 with the purpose of assessing its achievements and the actions identified to that end. The results will be used as a reference/evidence base for a future Strategy. The issue of digitalisation will be duly taken into account for setting future initiatives and actions for persons with disabilities.</p> <p>Concerning employment, Council Directive 2000/78/EC⁴³ prohibits discrimination on the grounds of, among other things, disability in employment and occupation. It also provides for reasonable</p>

⁴⁰ COM(2010) 636 final.

⁴¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016L2102>

⁴² COM(2015) 615 final.

⁴³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32000L0078:en:HTML>

	<p>accommodation for people with disabilities⁴⁴.</p> <p>In addition, the European Union provides financial resources, especially via the European Structural and Investment Funds, to support inclusion of the vulnerable into society. For example, the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative, which both support employment, social inclusion, education and life-long learning, have supported 634,000 people with disabilities between 2014 and 2016 in the European Union.</p>
--	---

⁴⁴ See Article 5 of the Directive.

<p>N°11 Future of work – acquiring of appropriate knowledge and skills to meet the needs of future jobs (exploratory opinion) EESC 2017/5265 - SOC/570 533rd Plenary Session - March 2018 Rapporteur: Ms Cinzia DEL RIO (GR/IT) Corapporteur: Ms Milena ANGELOVA (BG/I) DG EMPL – Commissioner THYSSEN</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.3. In order to prepare and respond to these rapid technological and digital changes, the European Economic and Social Committee, taking into account the subsidiarity principle, asks the Commission and the Member States to design targeted policies and take tangible measures in order to improve and appropriately adapt their education and training systems, co-design national competency strategies and recognise the right to appropriate training for all age groups of people and workers and across sectors by:</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the need to prepare for and respond to rapid technological and digital changes.</p> <p>The New Skills Agenda for Europe (Skills Agenda)⁴⁵ introduced a number of actions designed to improve the quality and relevance of training and other ways of acquiring skills and making them more visible, underpinned by improved information and understanding of trends and patterns in demands for skills and jobs (skills intelligence) to enable people to make better career choices and find quality jobs.</p> <p>The European Pillar of Social Rights⁴⁶, jointly proclaimed on 17 November 2017 by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, set out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems.</p> <p>Within the context of the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg in November 2017, the Commission presented its</p>

⁴⁵ COM(2016) 381 final.

⁴⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

	<p>vision for establishing a European Education Area by 2025 to promote cross-border mobility, to overcome unjustified obstacles that make it difficult to learn, train or work in another country, and to help Member States in making their education systems more inclusive and focused on lifelong-learning and innovation. The Commission has followed up on this by proposing a Digital Action Plan⁴⁷ and five Council Recommendations on key competences for lifelong learning⁴⁸, the promotion of common values and the European dimension of teaching⁴⁹, the automatic recognition of diplomas⁵⁰, the teaching and learning of language⁵¹ and high-quality early childhood education and care⁵².</p> <p>The Commission supports Member States through the Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2020⁵³ which defines benchmarks to be reached and offers support to national authorities through peer learning and peer counselling, exchange and pooling of expertise as well as the identification of best practices and the creation of toolboxes.</p>
<p>- first ensuring that all European Union citizens have equal access to quality early education;</p>	<p>The right to quality and inclusive education , training and lifelong learning is the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights: "Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long</p>

⁴⁷ COM("018) 22 final

⁴⁸ COM(2018) 24 final

⁴⁹ COM(2018) 23 final

⁵⁰ COM(2018) 270 final

⁵¹ COM(2018) 272 final

⁵² COM(2018) 271 final

⁵³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework_en

	<p>learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market”.</p> <p>The Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care^{54 55} calls for greater access to early education and care for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.</p> <p>Within the context of its vision of establishing a European Education Area by 2025, on 22 May 2018, the Commission proposed a Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care to develop a common Union-wide understanding of what constitutes good quality service provision and to support Member States in their efforts to improve access to and quality of their early childhood education and care systems.⁵⁶</p>
<p>- setting new common education and training benchmarks in order to narrow the gaps among European Union countries and strengthen cohesion;</p>	<p>The Commission will continue strengthening European statistics in education and training, employment and related social areas.</p> <p>Under the Education & Training 2020 framework⁵⁷, the Commission facilitates best practice sharing and supports ministries in improving and modernising their education systems, with common benchmarks.</p>
<p>- reorienting education and training and strengthening Vocational Education and Training systems in order to ensure the rapid</p>	<p>The Commission is continuing to work on measures to support the modernisation of Vocational Education</p>

⁵⁴ COM(2011) 66 final.

⁵⁵ COM(2011) 66 final.

⁵⁶ COM(2018) 271 final

⁵⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework_en

<p>acquisition of the necessary skills;</p>	<p>and Training, in line with the Skills Agenda and the Riga Conclusions⁵⁸.</p> <p>A series of activities aim to improve innovation and excellence and make Vocational Education and Training a first choice: the annual European Vocational Skills Week; the emphasis on work-based learning and work experience as part of initial training; and adoption in April 2018 of the Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships⁵⁹.</p>
<p>- supporting collective bargaining and social dialogue, in line with national industrial relations systems, in order to be able to anticipate and adapt the skills to technological and digital developments and develop on-the-job training;</p>	<p>Social dialogue is strongly supported by the Commission. This has been manifested by the New Start for Social Dialogue⁶⁰ launched by President Juncker in 2015 and recently confirmed by the European Pillar of Social Rights, which also includes a principle on social dialogue.</p> <p>The Commission provides logistical support to 43 sectoral social dialogue committees, and funds projects to support social partners in tackling the changes in employment and work-related challenges.</p> <p>The Commission consults the European and national social partners in the context of the European Semester.</p>
<p>- encouraging interaction between education institutions and companies;</p>	<p>The Agenda promotes cooperation between business and education and training institutions across the different</p>

⁵⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

⁵⁹ COM(2017) 563 final.

⁶⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventsId=1028>

	<p>measures, for instance in the Digital Skills and Job Coalition⁶¹ and the Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills⁶².</p> <p>On 30 May 2017, the Commission published a Communication on a renewed EU agenda for higher education⁶³ setting out its perspective on how higher education needs to adapt to a changing world. As part of this strategy, higher education institutions are invited to tailor curricula to current and anticipated needs of the economy and society. Moreover, the Commission supports links between higher education and business at the European level through the University-Business forum which brings together higher education institutions, companies, business associations, intermediaries, public authorities and policy makers to network and exchange ideas and good practice. Under the Erasmus+ programme, the Commission supports knowledge alliances between higher education institutions and companies.</p>
<p>- launching a qualification offensive to underpin the growing digitalisation of our labour markets;</p>	<p>The revamped European Qualifications Framework⁶⁴ is serving as a tool to support cooperation, reform and mobility, and is connecting Member States and stakeholders across Europe and further afield on issues including digitalisation. In addition, the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition supports information sharing and cooperation between employers and education and</p>

⁶¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-skills-jobs-coalition>

⁶² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7969>

⁶³ COM(2017) 247/2 final.

⁶⁴ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-efq>

	training stakeholders on future digital skills needs and how to support these in training and qualifications.
- developing new measures – such as results-based incentives, setting new monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the results achieved as far as digital and lifelong training coverage is concerned, exchange and widening at European Union level of the collection of best national practices concerning access to and participation in training, training leave, etc. – in order to include everybody in training programmes, both those looking for a job and those already in work, with particular attention to low-skilled and adult workers;	<p>The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways⁶⁵ invites Member States to evaluate the impact of the implementing measures on progress of the target group towards the acquisition of literacy, numeracy and digital competences.</p> <p>The Digital Education Action Plan was adopted on 17 January 2018⁶⁶. It outlines, through 11 initiatives, how the European Union can help people, educational institutions and education systems better adapt to life and work in an age of rapid digital change.</p>
- securing for all the provision of, and participation in, training in a way that simultaneously improves enterprise performance and workers’ personal and professional growth and extends coverage to non-standard jobs; ideally, it should be further examined whether such an individual training right should be portable, i.e. if people should be able to transfer it between employers and across countries;	The Commission is launching a survey, together with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, to explore recent and emerging policy responses to new forms of work, including measures targeted at developing and recognising the skills of those in new forms of work. The results of the study will be available in early 2019.
- taking steps to check if and what measures are needed to establish the right to paid educational leave and considering European Union measures with a view to making best practice in the area of minimum standards regarding entitlements to educational leave standard practice in some Member States;	The Commission draws on the information collected by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) to follow development in relation to paid educational leave. The Commission notes that this is an area that falls under national competences and the dialogue between the social partners.

⁶⁵ Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, OJ L 484, 24.12.2016.

⁶⁶ COM(2018) 22 final.

<p>- setting up a European homogeneous system of evaluation and validation of non-formal and informal learning;</p>	<p>The Commission has worked with Member States, stakeholders and experts over the past six years on implementation of the 2012 Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning⁶⁷, including through Union-level exchanges and peer learning. In June 2018 the Commission hosted an event (a 'festival') to highlight the advancements in validation during this time and also have a discussion and begin reflection on the future of validation in the European Union.</p>
<p>- investing at European Union level with specific and targeted funds to accompany the transition and setting new results-based criteria for their allocation;</p>	<p>Funding is already available to support workers and individuals in acquiring and developing relevant skills, including those necessary to accompany transitions through the European Social Fund and the other European Structural and Investment Funds, the European Fund for Strategic Investment and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund.</p>
<p>- encouraging job exchanges among enterprises in order to support "brain exchange" opportunities and create platforms for information and best practice sharing.</p>	<p>The Commission already provides platforms and opportunities for sharing information and best practice, including in the context of sectoral social dialogue, expert groups and stakeholder meetings.</p>
<p>1.5. [...] the European Economic and Social Committee asks the Commission and Member States to find ways not to leave behind but to accompany vulnerable people who will not be able to respond to the</p>	<p>The Principles of the Pillar explicitly address the challenges related to new forms of employment and adequate working conditions in atypical forms of</p>

⁶⁷ Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, OJ C 398, 22.12.2012.

<p>changes and the growing demands of the new technological era.</p>	<p>employment.</p> <p>The European Accessibility Act⁶⁸, proposed by the Commission in December 2015, aims to improve the functioning of the internal market for accessible products and services to bring benefits for disabled and older people.</p>
<p>2.6. The European Economic and Social Committee would like to call on the Commission and Member States to address the serious problem of the increasing number of people who lack the necessary educational background and who subsequently are unable to keep up with the speed of change, thus risking marginalisation.</p>	<p>The Commission reiterates the reference to the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Education Area, the Skills Agenda and, in particular, the Upskilling Pathways initiatives.</p>
<p>4.6. [...] the European Economic and Social Committee calls upon the Commission and the Member States, in the framework of the European Semester process, to adopt practical measures, such as: new monitoring mechanisms at European Union level in order to collect and evaluate data on the results achieved at national level as far as digital and lifelong training coverage is concerned; the setting of new benchmarks in order to reach new common basic education levels and digital skills schemes at European Union level and avoid the widening of the gap among European Union countries; reinforcing synergies among countries through participation in networks of e-infrastructures; and fixing new results-based robust criteria for the allocation of funds and the provision of incentives in order to improve the cohesion among Member States of their education and training systems</p>	<p>The Commission is currently reviewing, together with Member States, the existing benchmarks in the field of education and training. In this respect, the Commission is fully committed to supporting the development and further strengthening of quality and inclusive education and training systems in a lifelong learning perspective, and to further build on the lessons learnt from the current benchmarks.</p>

⁶⁸ COM(2015) 615 final.

<p>4.11. The European Economic and Social Committee calls on the Commission and the Member States to find instruments to guarantee adequate support for everybody in this "new society" and, at the same time, ensure that the public sector has the resources it needs to respond to these needs. In particular, those at risk of losing their job due to automation should be provided with training that would allow them to be re-skilled.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the importance of ensuring broad access to digital services, as it is laid out in the Digital Single Market Strategy launched in May 2015⁶⁹, which includes a Communication on a European Union eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020, aimed at accelerating the digital transformation of government.</p> <p>The Commission reiterates its reference to the use of available Union funding to accompany transitions, as well as to its Upskilling Pathways and Digital Skills and Jobs Coalitions aimed at boosting basic skills and digital skills at all levels.</p>
<p>4.14. The European Economic and Social Committee also asks the Commission and the Member States to make the best possible use of the Structural Funds, particularly the European Social Fund – whose priorities for human capital investment must be confirmed and safeguarded – for the adaptation of competences, as a complementary tool. The Commission and the Member States, together with civil society stakeholders, should develop a framework of common criteria in order to have a mutual understanding of the new skills needs and goals, taking into account, on the one hand, the differences across the European Union and the mobility not only of physical persons but also of work content; and, on the other hand, the requirement of homogeneous re- and up-skills levels in order to foster cohesion among European Union countries.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee's position on confirming and safeguarding the priorities for human capital investment for the Structural Funds, particularly the European Social Fund. This is very relevant in the context of the Commission's proposals for the next Multiannual Financial Framework.</p> <p>The Commission reiterates its reference to the Skills Agenda and the Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills regarding skills needs anticipation.</p>
<p>4.18. and 1.4. The European Economic and</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the</p>

⁶⁹ COM(2015) 192 final.

<p>Social Committee supports an approach putting strong emphasis on soft skills – such as complex problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork, sense-making, novel and adapted thinking, cross-cultural competency, virtual collaboration, cognitive flexibility, etc. –, as they are key elements of human development and can help workers to think in an autonomous way, before they are asked to become digitally competent. The European Economic and Social Committee suggests paying particular attention to the development of these skills in the revision of the European framework for key competences.</p>	<p>Committee’s position on the importance of soft skills as well as basic skills. This is in line with the Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning of 17 January 2018⁷⁰.</p> <p>Updates of the eight key competences include the "Personal, social and learning to learn competence", one of the eight key competences to be promoted which covers horizontal competences such as creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and communication. The Council adopted the Recommendation on 22 May 2018⁷¹.</p>
<p>4.21. The European Economic and Social Committee asks the Commission to further develop the setting-up of an updated "good practice registry" which has the potential to serve as facilitator for a Union-wide debate to identify guidelines and standards based on best practices in the field of vocational training.</p>	<p>The Commission is planning to launch, in the second half of 2018, an Apprenticeship Support Service, to support the introduction or improvement of apprenticeship systems within Member States, Candidate Countries and European Free Trade Association members.</p>

⁷⁰ COM(2018) 24 final.

⁷¹ 2018/C 189/01.

<p>N°12 A renewed impetus of the Africa-European Union Partnership JOIN(2017) 17 final EESC 2017/5043 - REX/495 533rd Plenary Session - March 2018 Rapporteur: Mr Mihai MANOLIU (GRI-RO) DG DEVCO - Commissioner MIMICA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.2. The European Economic and Social Committee proposes that the competent European Institutions keep up their peace-keeping and security work in Africa and assist African organisations in their efforts to prevent conflict, terrorism and organised crime. The European Economic and Social Committee endorses the Africa-European Union partnership and agrees that there is a need for an approach which takes account of the current geostrategic situation facing the two continents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the humane and dignified management of migration flows perceived as being out of control, - the possibility of an influx of refugees; - insecurity at the European Union's borders generated by the instability of certain political regimes and the absence of the rule of law in some African countries; - the increasing influence wielded in Africa by other regional powers such as China; - the specific interests regarding Africa's natural resources and bilateral economic relations do not spur on African countries to step up cross-border cooperation; - unpredictable action by the United States in the area of international policy, and 	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's call for stronger cooperation between the European Union and Africa in the field of peace and security. The European Union is one of the main contributors to the African Union Peace and Security Agenda. The African Peace Facility is currently the European Union's main tool for supporting the African Union and the African Regional Economic Communities in the area of peace and security. Since its creation, more than EUR 2.5 billion has been allocated to African-led Peace Support Operations, mediation actions under the Early Response Mechanism as well as capacity-building in view of fully operationalising the African Peace and Security Architecture.</p> <p>The African Union and the European Union will develop and implement a joint framework document to strengthen their partnership in peace and security, putting it on a more solid and structured basis.</p> <p>The European Union is collectively Africa's main foreign investor, its principle trading partner, a key security</p>

<p>challenges triggered by climate change.</p>	<p>provider, its main source of remittances, and its first partner in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.</p> <p>The European Union-Africa partnership and cooperation is increasingly moving towards effectively addressing global challenges, such as migration, climate change, peace and security, via enhanced cooperation in global fora. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are examples of this strengthened cooperation.</p> <p>The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was launched on 21 March 2018 by the African Union at its Assembly in Kigali. The Commission is strongly supporting its establishment, as well as sustainable customs reform and modernisation and other measures of trade facilitation.</p> <p>The Commission will also seek to enhance cooperation on sustainable management of natural resources and to strengthen collaboration in the fight against corruption, illicit financial flows, tax avoidance and evasion and on strengthening asset recovery.</p>
<p>1.3 In order to resolve the food problem, the European Economic and Social Committee considers that the European Union, together with the African Union, should identify successful local farming projects and policies and support the roll-out of those models to as many African regions and countries as possible. The overwhelming demographic dynamic cannot be overlooked here: 18 million new jobs a year until 2035 will be needed. Sustainable economic</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of food and nutrition security, while keeping in mind the considerable demographic pressures faced by Africa in the coming years. Sustainable agriculture remains at the core of European Union development cooperation with Africa, constituting a focal sector in many National Indicative Programmes for the period 2014-2020 with African states.</p>

<p>development in Africa is hindered by severe constraints however – which the European Union should take into account – that tie in closely with the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - its high dependency on intensive exploitation of natural resources (illegal trade in resources); - its propensity to trigger instability as a result of war, human rights violations, social inequality, fundamentalism and climate disasters; - the impact of climate change; - the impact of food and water shortages; - hygiene issues; - epidemics and infectious diseases; - the lack of coherent agricultural policies geared to local circumstances. 	<p>'Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture' is indeed the most important sector in European Union bilateral cooperation with Africa, with EUR 4.2 billion programmed for 2014-2020.</p> <p>In the context of the African Union–European Union Summit in Abidjan in November 2017, the European Union stressed the importance of investing in agri-business and agricultural value chains in Africa, as a way to foster job creation and sustainable livelihoods. In fragile contexts or countries more vulnerable to environmental or man-made hazards, an increased emphasis will be put on resilience of the population and to adaptation and mitigation measures.</p>
<p>1.4. These problems lead to forced and voluntary displacements and contribute, to a considerable extent, to irregular migration which is often run by organised crime and increases the pressure on governance systems and political leadership in the countries of origin and transit. Europe can respond by means of a new European Consensus on Development, European Neighbourhood Policy and a European agenda on migration, and by developing a relationship based on the concept of partnership. Along with genuine representatives of Africa's civil society (platform, forum and volunteers) and social partners, the European Economic and Social Committee can make a key contribution to democracy and human rights.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the importance of developing relationships based on the concept of partnership. The European Union is fully committed to addressing the root causes of irregular migration and effectively managing migration in a spirit of genuine partnership and shared responsibility, as well as in compliance with international law and human rights.</p> <p>The African Union-European Union Summit confirmed common priorities with African partners on migration, in particular on how to jointly address the root causes of irregular migration. The Summit committed to deepening cooperation and dialogue, by complementing existing initiatives such as the Joint Valletta Action Plan, Rabat and Khartoum Processes, as well as the Horn of Africa Initiative on Human</p>

	<p>Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants. It was also agreed to develop a joint framework for a strengthened continental dialogue.</p> <p>An African Union-European Union-United Nations Task Force was set up in November 2017 with the objective of saving and protecting lives of migrants and refugees along the routes, focusing in particular on Libya.</p>
<p>1.5. The European Economic and Social Committee would ask that the future partnership takes greater account of civil society, giving it a stronger role that goes from consultation to monitoring policy implementation. This is important for ensuring coherence in development policies and for ensuring effective stakeholder involvement. The European Union could thus be a model of best practice for the countries of Africa as regards involving civil society in decision making and designing programmes to promote the emergence of international civil society in Africa. Moreover, where civil society is non-existent or very weak, the European Union should play an active role in its development.</p>	<p>In line with the European Consensus on Development (OJEU C210, 30.6.2017), the Commission acknowledges and fully supports a strong, structured, responsible and effective involvement of civil society organisations, including the private sector, in the broad political dialogue process.</p> <p>More specifically in the run-up to the African Union-European Union Summit, the Commission supported the organisation of the third African-European Union Civil Society Forum in July 2017. It gathered representatives of African and European Civil Society Organisations, with the objective of bringing their views on critical issues pertaining to both continents' relations to the attention of European and African leaders. Furthermore, the Africa-Europe Youth Summit in October 2017 and the European Union-Africa Business Forum in November 2017 formed important preparatory events ensuring the close involvement of various civil society actors in policy discussions.</p> <p>As a follow-up to the above, it will be important to give Civil Society Organisations and other stakeholders the necessary space in the monitoring of the</p>

	<p>partnership. Special efforts will be needed to engage the African partners towards that end.</p>
<p>1.6. Given that education, the non-discriminatory transfer of knowledge and unfettered access to culture are strategically important for cooperation and the sharing of common values, as well as for opening up good prospects to a considerable number of young Africans, the European Economic and Social Committee proposes that the future European Union-Africa partnership should move in the following direction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - successful European programmes such as Erasmus+ should be extended to Africa, thus enabling the mobility of students and teachers on both continents and facilitating an exchange of academic experience; - partnerships between European and African universities (leading to the development of common projects and study programmes) must be encouraged and given financial support; - only good quality education programmes and strategies to combat social exclusion can put a stop to religious fundamentalism in some African countries. 	<p>The Commission remains committed to strengthening the African national education systems. At the African Union-European Union Summit it urged its African partners to honour their commitments regarding budgetary spending on education.</p> <p>The European Union is supporting those efforts by contributing EUR 1.34 billion to primary and secondary education as well as vocational education and training in African countries over the period 2014-2020.</p> <p>In addition, African countries benefit from Erasmus+ for different types of projects: student and staff mobility, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master degrees, capacity building of higher education institutions, and Jean Monnet activities.</p> <p>Since 2015, more than 9,700 African students, researchers and staff have benefitted from mobility in the European Union, while more than 4,300 European students and staff have studied/taught in Africa.</p> <p>Over the period 2014-2017, exchange of academic experience has also been facilitated through 89 capacity building projects which involved 218 African organisations.</p> <p>From 2014 to 2017, 62 African organisations have been involved in 35 Erasmus Mundus Joint Master degree projects and 643 scholarships have been awarded to African master students to study in at least two European countries.</p>

	<p>Finally, the European Union is providing critical support to the African higher education harmonisation initiatives, which review study programmes to make them more relevant and build up expertise in the field of institutional evaluation and quality assurance.</p>
<p>1.9. The European Economic and Social Committee would point out that China has recently emerged as Africa's top economic partner, which may affect the external policy goals of countries in the region and make them less interested in implementing democratic reforms. The European Union therefore needs a partnership with Africa to renew and step up the trade relationship in real terms between the two continents and establish optimum conditions at local level for European investors.</p>	<p>The European Union is collectively Africa's main foreign investor (33% of foreign direct investment in Africa worth EUR 33 billion in 2015), its principle trading partner (44% of African exports and 33% of African imports), a key security provider (14 Peace Support Operations in 18 countries), its main source of remittances (36% of EUR 21 billion in 2015) and its first partner in development and humanitarian assistance. In 2015, the Official Development Assistance by the European Union and its Member States to Africa was EUR 21 billion (i.e. 50% of the overall Official Development Assistance provided to Africa). In 2016, the European Union allocated EUR 747 million to humanitarian assistance in Africa, equal to 43% of the total European Union humanitarian aid. Both the European Union and Africa have much to gain from further strengthening their political and economic ties.</p> <p>The European Union and its Member States have been actively supporting the African continent in the historic launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area, and have declared their readiness to support the implementation of this significant step towards deepening continental integration in the spirit of African Union-European Union</p>

partnership and the joint political declaration of the Abidjan Summit in November 2017.

The European Union has been supporting the African Union Commission in its important role as facilitator of the negotiations of the Continental Free Trade Area for years and will continue to support it through the second phase of negotiations, the ratification process and implementation of the agreement.

Trade relations between Africa and the European Union remain governed by existing agreements at national or regional level such as Association Agreements and Economic Partnership Agreements. The implementation of the latter has only recently started, aiming to boost intra-regional trade and capacities in sub-Saharan Africa, thus contributing towards the realisation of the Continental Free Trade Area. Africa's other partners hardly match this level of ambition and commitment towards Africa's integration.

The new partnership agreement with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, which will be negotiated in the course of 2018, will build on existing strategies such as the Joint Africa-European Union Strategy. The Continental Free Trade Area and intra-African trade remain priorities in this context. The Commission proposal for a new partnership seeks to maintain the complementary support to both the Continental Free Trade Area and the implementation of trade agreements with the European Union, thus creating new economic opportunities for sustainable

	<p>growth, blue and green and small and medium-sized businesses, as well as to significantly enhance investment opportunities and facilitate private sector development.</p> <p>The European Union External Investment Plan⁷² provides a framework to improve sustainable investments in Africa and the European Neighbourhood. It will support innovative financial instruments such as guarantees to boost private investment. With an input of EUR 4.1 billion from the European Union, this will enable mobilising up to EUR 44 billion of private investments. The External Investment Plan focuses on priority investment areas, such as: sustainable energy and sustainable connectivity; micro, small and medium-sized enterprises financing; sustainable agriculture, rural entrepreneurs and agroindustry; sustainable cities and digitalisation for sustainable development.</p> <p>The European Fund for Sustainable Development is a one-stop-shop for investment proposals, primarily, in Africa and the Neighbourhood and is composed of regional investment platforms, the Africa Investment Platform and the Neighbourhood Investment Platform. The regional investment platforms combine two components: (1) their blending operations with an indicative budget of up to EUR 2.6 billion and (2) the European Fund for Sustainable Development Guarantee facility of EUR</p>
--	--

⁷² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/eu-external-investment-plan_en

	1.5 billion. Both instruments are expected to leverage more than EUR 44 billion of investments until 2020.
<p>1.10. The European Economic and Social Committee recommends introducing good governance clauses in all relevant agreements between the European Union and third countries or regions with a view to promoting sustainable development. A prerequisite for sustainable development is a responsible, transparent, active, fair, inclusive, efficient and participatory policy framing process which upholds the principles of the rule of law.</p>	<p>The Financial Regulation on the European Development Fund⁷³ and the Regulation establishing the Development Cooperation Instrument⁷⁴ explicitly state good governance as the core principle and priority of the external assistance. The programming documents and their revisions are based on the European Consensus on Development⁷⁵, which itself reflects the Sustainable Development Goals and their principles of good governance, in particular in Goal 16. The methodology used to define national and regional allocations under European Union assistance also include performance in good governance. Finally, right-based approach, gender equality and many other cross-cutting orientations are based on good governance principles.</p>
<p>1.12. The European Economic and Social Committee welcomes Africa’s wish, voiced through Agenda 2063 and the establishment of the African Union, to be treated as a single, integrated and pan-African entity.</p>	<p>The Commission has been supportive of the Agenda 2063 from the outset, welcoming it as a key document for guiding the European Union’s strategic partnership with Africa. The Agenda 2063 was also an important reference when setting out proposals for the European Union’s priorities and objectives for the African Union-European Union Summit in November 2017, and the Joint Communication from the Commission and the High Representative for a renewed impetus of</p>

⁷³ Council Regulation (EU) 2015/323 of 2 March 2015 on the financial regulation applicable to the 11th European Development Fund, OJ L 58, 3.3.2015.

⁷⁴ Regulation (EU) No 233/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation for the period 2014-2020, OJ L 77, 15.3.2014.

⁷⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/new-european-consensus-development-our-world-our-dignity-our-future_en

	the Africa–European Union Partnership, adopted in May 2017 ⁷⁶ .
--	---

⁷⁶ COM(2017) 17 final.