

FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
TO THE OPINIONS OF THE
EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE
PLENARY SESSION OF MARCH 2019¹

¹ Including the follow-ups to 1 opinion adopted during the February 2018 Plenary Session, to 2 opinions adopted during the October 2018 Plenary Session, to 2 opinions adopted during the December 2018 Plenary Session and to 2 opinions adopted during the February 2019 Plenary Session.

N°	Title	References
SG		
1.	<p><u>Listening to the citizens of Europe for a sustainable future (Sibiu and beyond)</u></p> <p>Rapporteurs: Vladimíra DRBALOVÁ (Gr. I-CZ), Peter SCHMIDT (Gr. II-DE), Yves SOMVILLE (Gr. III-BE)</p>	<p>EESC-2019-00936-00-01-PAC-TRA Ad-hoc Group</p>
SG		
2.	<p><u>The Future of the EU: Benefits to citizens and respect for European values (Exploratory opinion at the request of the Romanian Presidency)</u></p> <p>Rapporteur: Mihai IVAȘCU (Gr. III-RO)</p>	<p>EESC-2018-05821-00-01-PA-TRA SC/052</p>
SG		
3.	<p><u>Towards a comprehensive EU framework on endocrine disruptors</u></p> <p>Rapporteur: Brian CURTIS (Gr. II-UK)</p>	<p>COM(2018) 734 final EESC-2018-05760-00-00-AC-TRA NAT/754</p>
4. Opinion adopted during the plenary session of December 2018	<p><u>Clean air for all (communication)</u></p> <p>Rapporteur: Mr Octavian Cătălin ALBU (Gr. I-RO)</p>	<p>COM(2018) 330 final EESC-2018-03845-00-00-AC-TRA NAT/751</p>
5. Opinion adopted during the plenary session of October 2018	<p><u>Sustainable mobility for Europe</u></p> <p>Rapporteur: Giulia BARBUCCI (Gr. II-IT)</p>	<p>COM(2018) 293 final EESC-2018-03480-00-00-AS-TRA</p>

SG (EEAS consulted)		
6.	<u>Action plan against disinformation</u> Rapporteur: Ulrich SAMM (Gr. I-DE)	JOIN(2018) 36 final EESC-2018-06302-00-00-PA-TRA TEN/687
CNECT		
7.	<u>Digital health literacy (Own-initiative opinion)</u> Rapporteur: Renate HEINISCH (Gr. III-DE)	EESC-2019-00067-00-01-AC-TRA INT/874
8. Opinion adopted during the plenary session of February 2019	<u>The digital revolution in view of the needs and rights of citizens (own-initiative opinion)</u> Rapporteur: Ulrich SAMM (Gr. I-DE)	EESC-2018-04168-00-01-AC-TRA TEN/679
REGIO		
9.	<u>The future of cohesion policy (exploratory opinion requested by the Romanian presidency)</u> Rapporteur: Stefano MALLIA (Gr. I-MT)	EESC-2019-00255-00-01-AC-TRA ECO/484
EMPL		
10.	<u>Employment opportunities for economically inactive people (own-initiative opinion)</u> Rapporteur: José Custódio LEIRIÃO (Gr. III-PT)	EESC-2018-01711-00-00-AC-TRA SOC/575
11.	<u>Supportive education systems to avoid skills mismatches – what transition is needed (own-initiative opinion)</u> Rapporteur: Milena ANGELOVA (Gr. I-BG)	EESC-2018-02195-00-00-AC-TRA SOC/576
EAC		
12.	<u>Education about the European Union (Exploratory opinion at the request of the Romanian Presidency)</u> Rapporteur: Tatjana BABRAUSKIENĖ (Gr. II-LT)	EESC-2018-06187-00-01-PA-TRA SOC/612

JUST		
13.	<u>Resilient Democracy through a strong and diverse civil society (own-initiative opinion)</u> Rapporteur: Christian MOOS (Gr. III-DE)	EESC-2018-04661-00-02-PA-TRA SOC/605
FPI		
14.	<u>The White Dove Way – Proposal for an EU-led global peace-building strategy (own-initiative opinion)</u> Rapporteur: Jane MORRICE (UK-III)	EESC-2018-01717-00-00-AS-TRA REX/504
MOVE (EEAS/DEVCO/TRADE consulted)		
15.	<u>Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy</u> Rapporteur: Jonathan PEEL (Gr. I-UK)	JOIN(2018) 31 final EESC-2019-00209-00-00-AC-TRA REX/505
GROW		
16.	<u>European standardisation for 2019</u> Rapporteur: Elzbieta SZADZIŃSKA (Gr. III-PL)	COM(2018) 686 final EESC-2019-00112-00-00-PA-TRA INT/878
17.	<u>Harmonised standards</u> Rapporteur: Gerardo LARGHI (Gr. II-IT)	COM(2018) 764 final EESC-2019-00116-00-00-AC-TRA INT/879
18. Opinion adopted during the plenary session of October 2018	<u>Challenges and industrial change facing the EU aerospace sector (own-initiative opinion)</u> Rapporteur: Thomas KROPP (Gr. I-DE) Co-rapporteur: Enrico GIBELLIERI (Cat. 2-IT)	EESC-2018-01123-00-00-AC-TRA CCMI/158

<p>19. Opinion adopted during the plenary session of February 2018</p>	<p><u>Industrial change in the health sector (Own-initiative opinion)</u> Rapporteur: Joost VAN IERSEL (GR.I-NL) Co-rapporteur: Enrico GIBELLIERI (GR.II-IT)</p>	<p>EESC-2017-02848-00-00-AC-TRA CCMI/153</p>
SANTE		
<p>20. Opinion adopted during the plenary session of February 2019</p>	<p><u>Promoting healthy and sustainable diets in the EU (own-initiative opinion)</u> Rapporteur: Peter SCHMIDT (Gr. II-DE)</p>	<p>EESC-2018-04568-00-00-AC-TRA NAT/755</p>
AGRI		
<p>21. Opinion adopted during the plenary session of December 2018</p>	<p><u>Appellations of Origin and Geographical Indications</u> Rapporteur: Arnold PUECH D'ALISSAC (Gr. I-FR)</p>	<p>COM(2018) 365 final – 2018/0189 COD EESC-2018-04953-00-00-AC-TRA INT/873</p>

<p>N°1 Listening to the citizens of Europe for a sustainable future (Sibiu and beyond) EESC 2019/936 – Ad hoc Group 542nd Plenary Session – March 2019 Rapporteurs: Vladimíra DRBALOVÁ (GR. I-CZ), Peter SCHMIDT (GR. II-DE), Yves SOMVILLE (GR. III-BE) SG – President JUNCKER</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>The EESC calls first for an overarching strategy for sustainability in implementing the Agenda 2030, guaranteed by an ambitious EU budget.</p> <p>Competitiveness and sustainability are not in opposition as long as social and environmental aspects are part and parcel of the definition of competitiveness. Competitiveness must not be defined only by quantity and pricing but preferably by also taking into account European values, quality and sustainability, as part of a fully developed and well-functioning single market.</p> <p>Europe needs a new model of growth, one that is qualitatively different from what we have had thus far, that is more socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable, and able to encourage and accompany convergence of the digital and ecological transitions in our countries and societies.</p> <p>Sustainable investment is a crucial instrument to drive and promote the process of strengthening Europe's leadership towards a sustainable society. It has to stimulate high-quality job creation, renewable energy, education systems, affordable and accessible green public transport, eco-designed digital technology, research and innovation.</p> <p>European companies need to fulfil their role and their responsibilities and act as</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee's call to develop an overarching strategy for the implementation of the Agenda 2030. The Reflection Paper 'Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030'² forms part of the discussion on the future of Europe and provides inspiration for the discussion on the political priorities post 2019. The Reflection Paper includes three scenarios, one of which discusses such a strategy. As with all the reflection papers on the future of Europe, the scenarios offer ideas to spur the debate and thinking, rather than providing a detailed and operational plan on the way forward.</p> <p>Sustainable development is firmly anchored in the EU Treaties and the EU played a key role in the United Nations developing and adopting the 2030 Agenda. The Commission has been mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals in the European policy framework and Commission priorities, using the Better Regulation tools for this purpose.</p> <p>The Commission underlines that the principles of prosperity, sustainability, solidarity and security guide the Commission's proposal for the next multi-annual financial framework for 2021-2027. Sustainability is promoted through numerous programmes and spending instruments.</p>

² http://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/reflection-paper-towards-sustainable-europe-2030_en

<p>leaders in the eyes of the rest of the world if the competitiveness and economic sustainability of our European system is redefined in respect of our one and only planet's boundaries.</p>	
<p>2. People's Europe</p>	
<p>A structured Civil Dialogue must become a real tool of democratic participation as provided for in Article 11(1) and (2) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that engaging with citizens is essential to strengthen European identity and democracy and ensure greater ownership of the European project.</p> <p>The Commission's 2017 White Paper on the Future of Europe has provided new impetus to this process.</p> <p>In the last five years, hundreds of thousands of people have taken part in some 1,600 citizens' dialogues and in the citizens' consultations organised across Europe by or with the help of the Commission.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission systematically consults citizens and stakeholders when reviewing existing and when proposing new legislation. Thanks to the improvements made by the current Commission to the consultation process (announced in the 2015 Better Regulation Communication³), the European Union's consultation process now ranks first among the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development⁴.</p> <p>The Commission is continuously looking for ways to further improve its dialogue and engagement with citizens and stakeholders.</p>
<p>The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), as provided for under Article 1 (4) TEU and as the first transnational participatory tool worldwide, also needs further support and improvement. For its part, the EESC has fought for a simpler and more understandable set of rules for its implementation, and also acts as a</p>	<p>The Commission is grateful for the Committee's opinion, delivered on 14 March 2018, on the Commission's proposal for the revision of the Regulation on the European Citizens' Initiative⁵.</p> <p>The opinion's recommendations have been reflected in the final Regulation⁶. This concerns notably (i) enhancing advice and</p>

³ COM(2015) 215 final

⁴ See 2018 OECD Regulatory Policy Outlook: <https://www.oecd.org/governance/oecd-regulatory-policy-outlook-2018-9789264303072-en.htm>

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative (OJ L 130, 17.5.2019, p. 55).

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the European citizens' initiative (Text with EEA relevance) (OJ L 130, 17.5.2019, p. 55).

<p>facilitator between the Commission and citizens, in particular by organising the annual ECI Day conference and providing assistance and support to ECI organisers.</p>	<p>support to organisers (Article 4); (ii) simplification of the conditions and procedures for the registration of proposed citizens' initiatives (Article 6); (iii) organisation and representation in the public hearing at the European Parliament (Article 14); (iv) examination and response by the Commission (Article 15); (v) communication activities to raise awareness on the European Citizens Initiative instrument (Article 17).</p> <p>The regular interaction between the Committee and stakeholders (in particular through the annual ECI Day) contributes positively to informing the Commission on practical aspects related to the implementation of the European Citizens' Initiative.</p>
<p>Measures should be taken to ensure increased accountability and transparency of decision-making by EU institutions and national governments, also involving the regional and local level, to gain the support of citizens, such as a reform of the Council's working methods to improve transparency and resolving the accountability and transparency issues linked to the extensive use of closed "trilogues" prior to the adoption of acts at the first and second reading of the ordinary legislative procedure^{7,8}.</p>	<p>The Commission is committed to the transparency of the legislative process. Arrangements for trilogues, including regarding transparency of trilogue documents, are, however, mainly a matter for the co-legislators.</p> <p>The Commission stands ready to cooperate with the Finnish Presidency that, similarly to previous Presidencies, has declared a genuine interest in transparency.</p> <p>The Commission notes that the Council considers actions to increase its legislative transparency and notes with interest the proposal of the Romanian Presidency in this field.</p> <p>It supports in principle any decision the co-legislators would take to increase legislative transparency.</p>

⁷ EESC Opinion of 17 September 2015 on Improving the Lisbon Treaty, OJ C 13, 15.1.2016, p. 183.

⁸ EESC Resolution of 5 July 2017 on the Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe and beyond OJ C 345, 13.10.2017, p. 11.

<p>Institutional mechanisms should be established to increase the impact of EESC opinions in EU policy-shaping and decision-making processes, for instance through enhanced monitoring of the follow-up given to the Committee's opinions and the conclusion of a cooperation agreement with the EU Council to ensure, inter alia, the systematic provision to Council working groups of information on Committee opinions.</p>	<p>As underlined in the Protocol on cooperation signed between the Commission and the Committee on 22 February 2012, the Commission recognises the value of following up the Committee's opinions. It provides detailed replies to the opinions adopted at each plenary session. The Secretariat-General strives to ensure that the replies are pertinent, exhaustive and delivered timely.</p>
<p>Garnering public support for the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 for a new social deal is paramount.</p>	<p>Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is a shared responsibility and requires effective cooperation at EU, national, regional and local level, respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Public authorities, civil society, the private sector, academia, social partners and citizens each have their role to play.</p>
<p>3. Social Europe</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A new 'social deal' that offers all citizens a fairer and more equal society is indispensable. That is why the EESC calls for a social action programme in order to transpose the UN Agenda 2030 to all levels. - The EESC calls for a general improvement of and increased investment in education systems and supports a universal entitlement to lifelong learning that enables people to acquire skills and to reskill and upskill; stepping up investments in the institutions, policies and strategies that will support people through future of work transitions; and implementing a transformative and measurable agenda for gender equality are all elements that should receive wide support⁹. 	<p>The Commission Communication on 'Next steps for a sustainable European Future' highlighted that the European Union will be a frontrunner in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, together with Member States, in full respect of subsidiarity. The European Pillar of Social Rights, jointly proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the Commission, provides the main guiding framework for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the social field in the EU. The reflection paper 'Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030' included three scenarios for the future. The reflection paper is intended to inspire a broad debate on the future of Europe, the preparation of the European Union's Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 and the priority setting of the next Commission, including in the employment and social area. On 30 April 2019, the Commission</p>

⁹ 'Work for a brighter future'. ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work, 22 January 2019. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---cabinet/documents/publication/wcms_662410.pdf

	<p>presented its contribution to the European Union's Strategic Agenda 2019-2024¹⁰. Fair Europe has been identified as one of the five policy dimensions on which, in the Commission's view, future action should focus.</p> <p>The first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights stipulates that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long 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 Commission promotes a strategic approach to skills, supporting the definition, in cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, of comprehensive national skills strategies based on wide stakeholders' involvement and active participation of all government departments. It works with Member States to promote effective and excellent systems of vocational training that should equip everyone with the skills they require throughout their career.</p> <p>The Commission's work has a particular focus on the 60 million adults who are low-skilled or low-qualified; the Upskilling Pathways initiative¹¹, adopted in 2016, aims at providing each of these adults with a pathway to raise their level of basic skills and lead ultimately to a further qualification.</p> <p>Supporting people in their transitions across education and training programmes, between them and the labour market, and within the labour market is pursued through the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework and the Europass platform for skills and qualification services, building upon the achievements of the Europass portfolio.</p>
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¹⁰ European Commission's contribution to the informal EU27 leaders' meeting in Sibiu (Romania) on 9 May 2019: 'Europe in May 2019: Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world'.

¹¹ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOC_2016_484_R_0001

4. Sustainable Environment	
<p>4.1. Environmental risks continue to dominate the results of the annual Global Risks Perception Survey (GRPS). This year, they accounted for three of the top five risks by likelihood and four by impact. Extreme weather was the risk of greatest concern, but survey respondents are increasingly worried about environmental policy failure: having fallen in the rankings after Paris, "failure of climate-change mitigation and adaptation" jumped back up to second place in terms of impact this year¹².</p> <p>4.2. There will be no life, no jobs and no entrepreneurship on a dead planet. The collapse of biodiversity and climate change therefore mean that it is an absolute prerequisite for the EU to create high-quality jobs¹³ and provide a solution beneficial to employers, workers and other representatives of civil society. Delaying adaptation, or not acting at all, could substantially increase the total cost of climate change¹⁴ and its deadly impact on biodiversity, including humanity.</p> <p>4.3. The draft European Finance-Climate Pact has been in discussion for several years and is still being discussed. This Pact would allow the EU to maintain its leadership in sustainable development and in the fight against climate change¹⁵.</p> <p>- This strategy must ensure that at least the Paris Agreement has to be fully and immediately implemented and reflected through alignment of the EU's emissions reduction targets for 2030 and 2050 with</p>	<p>In November 2018, the Commission adopted a Communication entitled 'A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy'²⁰. It contains an analysis of various pathways to achieve a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions economy by 2050. All scenarios include a high level of energy efficiency and renewable energy penetration. The Commission also incorporated both energy efficiency and renewable energy as key building blocks to deliver on a climate neutral Europe.</p> <p>In parallel, the European Union is working with third country partners to implement the Paris Agreement, including its call for plans to balance anthropogenic emissions with removals in the second half of this century.</p> <p>The European Union considers both just transition of the workforce and safeguarding and creating sustainable employment and decent work as crucial elements to ensure public support for reaching the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement. In this regard, the EU signed the Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration issued at COP24 to show European Union's commitment towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement.</p> <p>With regard to food waste and to help the EU achieve the Sustainable Development Goal commitment of halving food waste by 2030, the Commission has adopted a Delegated Act laying down a common food waste measurement methodology to support Member States in quantifying food waste at each stage of the food supply chain. Based on a common definition of food waste, the methodology will ensure coherent</p>

¹² The Global Risk Report 2019 for the world economic forum. Executive summary available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2019.pdf

¹³ EESC Opinion of 25 January 2017 on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

¹⁴ OECD Report of 2 September 2016 on 'The economic consequences of Climate Change'. Available at: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/environment/the-economic-consequences-of-climate-change_9789264235410-en#page15

¹⁵ EESC Opinion of 17 October 2018 on the European Finance-Climate Pact.

²⁰ COM(2018) 773 final.

the commitment to limit temperature increases to max. 1°C and through ambitious EU climate policies, including a rapid phase-out of all fossil fuels, moving from energy efficiency towards an absolute decrease in energy use. The **EU should accelerate the just and sustainable transition to the highest possible level of renewable energy supply**¹⁶ which is clean, affordable, supports community ownership and does not lead either to energy poverty or to undermining the sustainable competitiveness of European companies at global level.

- The Finance-Climate Pact must cover all aspects of a climate change policy, such as a just transition to mitigate the effects of change, and compensate for the damages and losses, as well as real policies for adaptation to climate change.

- The EESC reiterates its **call for the development of a comprehensive food policy**¹⁷ in the EU, with the aim of providing healthy diets from sustainable food systems, linking agriculture to nutrition and ecosystem services, and ensuring supply chains which safeguard public health for all sections of European society. A fair distribution of the added value along the food supply chain is essential.

- Agriculture could be part of the solution in mitigating climate change (circular economy, CO₂ storage, etc.) since it covers a huge part of European territory. Moreover, sustainable agriculture plays an important role in maintaining the socio-economic fabric in rural areas.

- **EU must transform a linear economy into a circular, carbon-free economy.** Circular economy policies should ensure that cycles are long-lasting, small, local and clean. For some specific industrial

monitoring of food waste levels across the EU. Preventing food waste was identified as one of priority areas in the Circular Economy Action Plan adopted by the Commission in December 2015²¹.

Please note that the Commission has already made comments on the Opinion NAT/735 regarding the Finance-Climate Pact.

Agriculture is part of the solution both for mitigation (carbon-sinks) and for adaptation (to increase resilience: protection against floods and desertification, water retention). This requires sustainable practices (e.g. agro-forestry, less use of pesticides and fertilisers) that also protect biodiversity.

The Commission adopted in 2015 the Circular Economy Action Plan, which can be now considered complete. The Commission's Report on the implementation of the action plan²², adopted on 4 March 2019, illustrates the results of the implementation of the action plan, and highlights the positive trend over the past years in growth and jobs creation on the basis of the data from the monitoring framework²³.

Together with this report, the Commission presented a Staff Working Document²⁴ with details on the 54 actions listed in the action plan. With the implementation of the action plan, the Commission has started a systemic transformation to ensure that materials, products and resources stay in the cycle for as long as possible while localising jobs and growth while at the same time achieving the protection of the environment and increased

¹⁶ EESC Opinion of 2 July 2015 on 'The Paris Protocol – A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020'.

¹⁷ EESC Opinion of 6 December 2017 on 'Civil society's contribution to the development of a comprehensive food policy in the EU'.

activities, the size of the loops can tend to be large¹⁸.

- Common standards should be set up and enforced to deliver clean air and water and to protect our oceans.

Ambitious measures must be implemented to stop deforestation and biodiversity loss in Europe and globally, and to end the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, including from the Global South. Measures should be taken to bring European consumption levels into line with the Earth's capacity to produce, including through implementing sufficiency strategies¹⁹.

quality of life.

Please note that the Commission already made comments on the Committee Opinion of 27 April 2016 on the Circular Economy Package.

Common standards for clean air have been set by Directives 2004/107/EC²⁵ and 2008/50/EC²⁶, taking into account standards, guidelines and programmes of the World Health Organisation. The 'Clean Air For All' Communication²⁷ outlines measures to reduce air pollution, and also established Clean Air Dialogues to support EU Member States with implementation. The Water Framework Directive plays a significant role in protecting water sources (rivers and lakes, transitional waters (estuaries), coastal waters and groundwater). The Marine Strategy Framework Directive strives to achieve healthy, clean and productive seas and is the environment pillar of the Commission's Integrated Maritime Policy. The single-use plastics Directive aims to protect the marine environment and to reduce the costs of environmental damage attributed to plastic pollution. The protection of forests is also a priority for the EU and the Commission is currently considering new actions to tackle deforestation and forest degradation. The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, adopted in 2011, aims to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services by 2020, and to restore

²¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Closing the loop - An EU action plan for the Circular Economy (COM(2015) 614 final).

²² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/report-implementation-circular-economy-action-plan-1_en

²³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/circular-economy/indicators/monitoring-framework>

²⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/report_implementation_54_actions.pdf

¹⁸ EESC Opinion of 27 April 2016 on the 'Circular Economy Package'.

¹⁹ 'Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for its Citizens' of 28 September 2018.

²⁵ Directive 2004/107/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 relating to arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in ambient air (OJ L 23, 26.1.2005, p. 3).

²⁶ Directive 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (OJ L 152, 11.6.2008, p. 1).

²⁷ COM(2018) 330 final.

	<p>them to the extent possible, while also stepping up efforts to avert global biodiversity loss.</p>
<p>5. European business as a stronger sustainable global leader</p>	
<p>5.1. Business is an enabler for societal and environmental development, and sustainable competitiveness is a necessary pre-condition for companies to play their role in society. Companies are increasingly operating in a sustainable way, based on their own specific circumstances and resources and in collaboration with their stakeholders, to monitor, assess and report on the social, environmental, consumer protection and human rights impacts of their business operations. Europe therefore needs to take an approach in its policies that is in line with its ambition of becoming the global leader in sustainable development. There are already frontrunners among companies in Europe, but they have to be more ambitious and spread this sustainable mindset across value chains, giving particular encouragement to SMEs.</p> <p>5.2. A multitude of new models are transforming the relationship between producers, distributors and consumers. Some of these new models (such as the functional economy, the sharing economy and responsible finance) seek to address other key challenges for people and the planet that are crucial for sustainable development, such as social justice, participatory governance and the conservation of resources and natural capital.</p>	<p>The Commission shares the views expressed and has already taken action in this sense. This is underlined in various communications. The two most relevant of these are: on industrial policy, ‘Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable Industry - A renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy’²⁸; on the Sustainable Development Goals ‘Next steps for a sustainable European future, encompassing the economic, social, environmental dimensions of sustainable development, as well as governance, within the EU and globally’²⁹.</p>
<p>6. Free and Fair Trade</p>	
<p>6.3. In unilateral terms, the EU should modernise and improve the Generalised</p>	<p>In October 2018, the Commission submitted a report and an accompanying Staff Working</p>

²⁸ COM(2017) 479 final.

²⁹ COM(2016) 739 final.

<p>Scheme of Preferences (GSP) and Everything But Arms (EBA) in order to encourage the development of the Least Developed Countries and developing countries.</p>	<p>Document on the mid-term evaluation of EU Regulation 978/2012³⁰ on a generalised system of preferences, the so-called GSP Regulation³¹. The mid-term evaluation found that the GSP Regulation was overall delivering on its objectives of (i) contributing to poverty eradication by expanding exports from the countries most in need; (ii) contributing to sustainable development and good governance; and (iii) ensuring better protection of the EU's financial and economic interests.</p> <p>For example, the mid-term evaluation found that the GSP Regulation had contributed to a considerable expansion of EU imports from the world's most vulnerable countries. EU imports from the least developed countries, (i.e., those benefiting from the 'Everything But Arms' arrangement) increased by 62% when comparing the periods 2014-2016 to 2011-2013.</p> <p>The mid-term evaluation also found that the generalised system of preferences had positively contributed to the furtherance of eradicating poverty, social development and respect of human and labour rights. It was also found to be of continued high relevance for the development needs of developing countries and coherent with other EU external policies.</p> <p>The current GSP Regulation expires on 31 December 2023. The results of the mid-term evaluation will be an important input for the preparatory work required for putting into place the next GSP Regulation.</p>
<p>6.3. In bilateral terms, the EU should continue to open new markets and increase business opportunities and consumer satisfaction with more partners while ensuring high social and environmental standards in agriculture,</p>	<p>In the past five years, the Commission has negotiated and concluded more trade agreements than in any comparable period. Two major comprehensive trade agreements, with Canada and Japan, are already in force, while the trade and</p>

³⁰ Regulation (EU) No 978/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 applying a scheme of generalised tariff preferences and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 732/2008 (OJ L 303, 31.10.2012, p. 1).

³¹ Report from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of Regulation (EU) No 978/2012 applying a Scheme of Generalised Tariff Preferences and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 732/2008 (COM(2018) 665 final) and Commission Staff Working Document: Midterm Evaluation of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (SWD(2018) 430 final).

<p>industry and services.</p>	<p>investment agreements with Singapore are expected to follow soon. Negotiations with Mexico and Vietnam are complete and those with Australia and New Zealand are well under way.</p> <p>The EU has now 40 trade agreements with 72 countries around the globe; this is the largest trade network in the world.</p> <p>High social and environmental standards are key features of EU's trade agenda. EU trade agreements now include a sustainable development chapter with legally binding commitments on labour rights, in accordance with the core eight conventions of the International Labour Organization, and on the environment in agreement with Multilateral Environmental Agreements in force, including the Paris climate agreement.</p>
<p>6.3. In multilateral terms, the EU should play a leading role in the reform of the WTO in order to avoid paralysis of the Appellate Body of the Dispute Settlement Body. The EESC recently adopted an ambitious and forward-looking set of proposals for this reform in the short and medium term. The aims are to ensure that the WTO, the sole guardian of international trade, makes a fundamental contribution to achieving the SDGs, maintains consistency between trade rules and international labour standards, and facilitates the fulfilment of commitments made under the Paris Agreement.</p>	<p>The preservation of the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organisation at its core is a key priority. In particular, the Commission has put forward a proposal for concrete changes to overcome the deadlock in the World Trade Organisation Appellate Body. The Commission intends to pursue these efforts together with partner countries in the coming months.</p> <p>As regards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, it is indeed important to highlight ways in which trade policy contributes to achieving these goals and further develop this potential. In particular, it is worth reflecting on ways to enhance the mutual supportiveness between trade and labour, and trade and climate policies.</p> <p>In parallel, the Commission supports the fulfilment of the commitments made under the Paris Agreement through its comprehensive bilateral trade agenda. The Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and Japan is the first agreement to include a commitment to implement effectively the Paris climate agreement.</p>
<p>6.3. Openness to trade requires effective trade defence instruments and an operational screening mechanism for Foreign Direct Investment in strategic EU</p>	<p>Trade defence instruments have been recently modernised to respond effectively to unfair trading practices. Furthermore, a new cooperation mechanism for the</p>

sectors. This is of course to protect the EU and its consumers, workers and companies against unfair and predatory trade practices.	screening of Foreign Direct Investments will help the EU identify cases, where foreign investments threaten its security and public order.
6.3. It is essential to deepen cooperation at international level with all the relevant organisations (OECD, UNECE, ILO, WTO and so on) in order to efficiently address global challenges including climate change, poverty, fraud, tax evasion and cyberattacks.	The Commission shares the view that global challenges require coordinated responses and, to this end, works closely with the relevant international organisations, such as United Nations, World Trade Organization, International Labour Organization, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the relevant regional organisations.
7. Public goods and services	
<p>7.1. According to Principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, <i>"Everyone has the right to access essential services of good quality, including water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services and digital communications"</i>³². These services cannot operate only according to common competition and market rules: specific rules are essential to ensure that every citizen has affordable access to these services, which are considered essential and are recognised as common values of the Union³³.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public authorities need to drive sustainable development goals through their public procurement contracts by proactively applying environmental and social procurement criteria as defined in the new European legislation on public procurement. - Basic public services³⁴ such as education, health, childcare and public transport, and public goods such as clean drinking water, clean air and unspoiled soil, etc., must be 	<p>The Commission recognises the role played by services of general interest and services of general economic interest in promoting social and territorial cohesion and in providing an essential safety net for citizens, as well as their place in the shared values of the Union. Union law therefore respects the wide discretion of national, regional and local authorities in the organisation of such services.</p> <p>The application of single market and competition rules to services of general economic interest therefore needs to take into account their specific nature, and to meet the challenge of delivering them in a way that incorporates the values of quality, safety, affordability, equal treatment, universal access and users' rights.</p> <p>The above principles are recognised in Article 14 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU and in the Protocol no. 26 on Services of General Interest, as well as in Article 36 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and will continue to be upheld by the Commission.</p>

³² These services, which the Commission describes as 'essential services', and whose 20th principle does not provide an exhaustive list, fall under 'services of general interest' subject to public service obligations. The notion of 'essential services' does not exist in EU law, which deals only with public services (transport) and services of general interest (economic and non-economic).

³³ The EESC is currently drafting an own-initiative opinion, 'For a better implementation of the Social Pillar, promoting essential services', within the framework of the EESC contribution for the Sibiu Summit and beyond.

³⁴ EESC Opinion of 17 October 2018 on the 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)'.

accessible for all, at affordable costs.	
8. Fair taxation	
<p>8.1. Tax policy in the EU has two components: direct taxation, which remains the sole responsibility of the Member States, and indirect taxation, which affects free movement of goods and the freedom to provide services in the single market. With regard to direct taxation, the EU has nevertheless established some harmonised standards for company and personal taxation, whilst Member States have taken joint measures to prevent tax avoidance and double taxation. Nevertheless, the EU must continue to promote a fair tax system that requires individuals and legal entities to pay tax on their income and profits proportionally. Concerning indirect taxation, the EU coordinates and harmonises law on value-added tax (VAT) and excise duties. It ensures that competition in the internal market is not distorted by variations in indirect taxation rates and by systems giving businesses in one country an unfair advantage over others.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that it should continue to promote fair and efficient taxation. This includes both initiatives at EU level (e.g. the proposals on the value added tax definitive regime, common consolidated corporate tax base, as well as on the taxation of the digital economy), as well as analysis and country-specific recommendations provided in the European Semester.</p>
<p>8.2. Lack of transparency, discrimination, distortion of competition and harmful tax practices increase economic inequalities and reduce investments and jobs, leading to social dissatisfaction, mistrust and a democratic deficit. This is why a fair EU taxation policy should be implemented in keeping, and not in contradiction, with the overarching strategy of sustainability in order to promote economic and social convergence, social cohesion and investment in sustainable development.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that EU tax policies should be designed and implemented as part of a holistic strategy in support of sustainable and inclusive growth, as set out in the Commission services non-paper ‘The role of taxation in supporting inclusive and sustainable economic growth’³⁵. This includes measures in support of the EU’s competitiveness and a socially just transition to a greener economy.</p>
<p>The EESC supports fair taxation and the fight against fraud, tax evasion, money laundering and the financial practices of tax havens; a common objective of EU institutions, governments and business must be to work together in order to put in place efficient mechanisms such as the</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that good cooperation between the EU institutions, national governments, and stakeholders is central for effective policy making in support of fair and efficient taxation.</p>

³⁵ WK 4501/2019 INIT.

two anti-tax avoidance directives .	
<p>Coordination in the fight against fraud and tax evasion should include measures against corporate base erosion and profit shifting: the European Commission estimated that this accounted for EUR 50-70 billion annually before measures started to be implemented. Non-collected VAT is estimated to be in the region of EUR 150 billion every year.</p>	<p>The fight against tax abuse is central for the Commission. In the past years, the Commission has taken decisive action in that regard, including the anti-tax-avoidance directives and the directives on administrative cooperation. The European Commission agrees that further coordinated action is needed.</p>
<p>The EU must cooperate with other economic regions to effectively fight corruption and tax evasion worldwide and to ensure that international rules on corporation tax are clear, transparent, objective and predictable.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the importance of an external tax strategy. This has been a central element of the Commission's tax agenda in the past years, including the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions.</p>
<p>The public is increasingly demanding that taxation be used to ensure social cohesion, to combat global warming and to promote sustainable growth.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that EU tax policies should be designed and implemented as part of a holistic strategy in support of sustainable and inclusive growth, as set out in the Commission services non-paper 'The role of taxation in supporting inclusive and sustainable economic growth'³⁶.</p>
<p>The EESC calls for effective and coordinated taxation measures to ensure that all companies pay their fair share of taxes and contribute to national and European public budgets to enable governments to meet their social rights. The EESC supports the Commission's proposal on the establishment of a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB).</p>	<p>The Commission appreciates the Committee's support for the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base and agrees that a fair burden sharing between taxpayers and a level-playing between business are crucial for competitiveness, social cohesion and sustainable tax revenues in the EU.</p>
<p>The EESC believes that it is very important to develop new principles on how to attribute corporate profits to an EU country and tax them, in dialogue with trading partners, and to actively participate in the ongoing discussions at OECD/G20 level on a global agreement on the digitalised economy, in order to avoid any escalation of trade and tax tensions between major economic players in the world.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that the international corporate tax framework is in urgent need of reform, as set out in the Issues Paper on the reform of international corporate taxation: 'Business taxation 21'³⁷. The EU should actively shape such reform through the discussions at OECD/G20 level. An EU coordinated position would increase the EU's leverage in shaping the reforms and make sure that EU common interests and requirements are fully reflected in the</p>

³⁶ WK 4501/2019 INIT.

³⁷ ST 9150 2019 INIT.

	global agreement.
9. Governance	
<p>9.1. Driving the transformation towards sustainable development requires a new governance approach and new rules and instruments, when defining and implementing EU policies. Sustainable development requires a holistic and cross-sector policy approach to ensure that economic, social and environmental challenges are addressed together.</p>	<p>The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, adopted by the United Nations in September 2015, have given a new impetus to global efforts to achieve sustainable development. The EU has played an important role in shaping the 2030 Agenda, through public consultations, dialogue with its partners and in-depth research. The EU is committed to playing an active role to maximise progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, as outlined in its Communication ‘Next steps for a sustainable European future’³⁸. The Sustainable Development Goals are firmly anchored in the European Treaties and mainstreamed in all its programmes, sectoral policies and initiatives.</p> <p>Each year the EU continues its efforts, via its policy and regulatory instruments, to pursue Sustainable Development Goals, and plays a key role in supporting, coordinating and complementing Member States' policies also in financial terms via the EU budget.</p> <p>As the Sustainable Development Goals are interlinked, many EU actions can contribute to several Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>Cohesion Policy is the main EU funding instrument for Sustainable Development Goals, with the European Rural Development Fund and Cohesion Fund dedicating 94% of resources to 11 Sustainable Development Goals. Cohesion policy’s overall mission to reduce economic, social, and environmental territorial disparities between the EU regions is largely in line with the principles underpinning the Sustainable Development Goals, which allows for an assessment of how the policy contributes to them.</p> <p>Over the long term, cohesion policy contributes to the Goal 10 on reduced inequalities. Its contribution to Goal 10</p>

³⁸ COM(2016) 739 final.

	<p>cannot, however, be calculated based on monitoring data and can only be estimated via evaluations. On the basis of the monitoring data it is possible to assess how cohesion policy, through all its funds (Cohesion Fund, European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund, including the Youth Employment Initiative) contributes towards thematic chapters of the Sustainable Development Goals, as explained below.</p> <p>Overall, 94% of cohesion policy investments contribute to eleven Sustainable Development Goals. As shown in Table 1 below, approximately half of these investments (approximately €200 billion) promote modern economic growth in SDG 9 (Industry, innovation, infrastructure) and SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth). Other significant areas of investment contribute to SDG 4 (Quality of education, €34 billion).</p>
<p>- The EU needs to ensure that all its internal and external policies are coherent and aligned with the SDGs, so that the principles of efficiency, proportionality and sustainability are duly considered.</p>	<p>The Commission points out that, as stated in the European Consensus for Development, policy coherence for development is part of the broader policy coherence for sustainable development needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>The ‘2019 EU report on Policy Coherence for Development’³⁹ was published in January 2019 together with the Reflection Paper ‘Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030’ to demonstrate that policy coherence for development is a key element in the overall EU efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. This report takes stock of what has been done at EU and at Member States’ level concerning policy coherence for development over the period 2015-2018. It focuses on a limited number of topical priority areas along the five ‘P’ of the 2030 Agenda to reflect the new dynamics of the Sustainable Development Goals and the requirements of the new European Consensus on Development.</p>

³⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/eu-report-pcd-2019_en.pdf

<p>- Taking into account the sustainable development goals, the REFIT Platform and impact assessments and evaluations must help to ensure that legislation is favourable to business and citizens. These tools should, in the future, continue to use all available sources, including civil society, to assess how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of EU legislation in view of its objectives. These tools should contribute to extensive regulatory improvement of sustainable development in all its dimensions, aiming not only to simplify and reduce unnecessary burdens and to ensure effective achievement of legislative objectives without lowering them, but also to help to review, validate, amend, enhance or better enforce existing legislation.</p>	<p>Significant effort has been made to simplify and rationalise the programming and implementation, of cohesion policy, through a set of 80 simplification measures, which have been overwhelmingly welcomed and supported by stakeholders.</p> <p>These measures ultimately aim at simplifying the access to EU funding to beneficiaries and sharply reduce the afferent administrative burden. Higher ownership and better quality projects are in turn expected.</p> <p>Dialogue with Member States and stakeholders will nonetheless continue, to ensure that these measures are effective and are accompanied to this end by the required reduction of gold plating in Member States.</p>
<p>- The European Semester as the EU's economic governance framework has some focus on employment and social performance, but it is weak on the dangers presented by climate change and on the EU's progress towards reaching the Paris targets, as reported in the Annual Growth Survey 2019. The EESC calls for a forward-looking sustainable development strategy embedded in a Sustainable Development Cycle, based on complementary social, economic and environmental indicators and targets.</p>	<p>The 2019 cycle of the European Semester integrated an investment country-specific recommendation, with an even stronger emphasis on explicit investment guidance for the 2021-2027 cohesion policy funds. This guidance is based on the five cohesion policy objectives, proposed by the Commission for the 2021-2027 legislative framework governing the funds, closely related to the three pillars of sustainable growth: economic, social and environmental sustainability.</p> <p>Thus, the future programming and strategic orientation of cohesion policy, which is the financial delivery tool of the Union's medium and longer-term development strategy, has become an integral part of the yearly process of policy coordination.</p>
<p>- Social dialogue must be recognised as a tool for implementing the development agenda. Social dialogue requires an enabling environment and an effective institutional framework. This begins with respect for freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. The EU should work with the social partners to promote sound industrial relations practices and smoothly functioning labour</p>	<p>In line with its Treaty obligations, the Commission promotes the role of social partners at the EU level, taking into account the diversity of national systems, and facilitates the dialogue between the social partners, respecting their autonomy. The European Pillar of Social Rights includes a principle on social dialogue. It states that social partners should be consulted on the design and implementation of economic, employment and social policies according to</p>

<p>administrations.</p>	<p>national practices and that they should be encouraged to negotiate and conclude collective agreements in matters relevant to them, while respecting their autonomy and the right to collective action. The Commission continues to deliver on the priorities of the New Start for Social Dialogue, launched in 2015⁴⁰. It strengthened the role of social partners in the European Semester, improved their involvement in policy- and law-making and gave more emphasis to the support to capacity-building of national social partners in its proposal for the European Social Fund Plus.</p>
<p>10. A comprehensive approach to migration policy</p>	
<p>10.1. The debate on the future of a sustainable Europe cannot ignore Europe's approach to migration. Demographic developments show that Europe will need migrants, their talent, skills and entrepreneurial potential. There is an urgent need to change the narrative and policies on migration based on closer cooperation with third countries, to ensure a rational debate on the basis of facts. Refugees and migrants should be seen not as a threat but as an opportunity for Europe's economic and social model. For this we need a comprehensive approach and strategy for migration.</p> <p>The EU should adopt policies and measures that endorse safe, orderly and regular migration and also strengthen inclusion and social cohesion. The EU should work in closer coordination with the ILO as far as the labour migration and</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's opinion and agrees that the debate on the future of a sustainable Europe cannot ignore Europe's approach to migration, as underlined in its contribution to the informal EU-27 leaders' meeting in Sibiu (Romania) on 9 May 2019 'Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world'.</p> <p>The Commission also agrees that safe, orderly and regular migration can have economic and social benefits for all. In recent Communications⁴¹, the Commission has reaffirmed its commitment to enhance legal pathways to the EU as an essential element of the EU's migration management and confirms the need for a comprehensive approach, where both internal and external actions serve to ensure effective control of the EU's external borders, a firm policy on return and well-managed legal migration and</p>

⁴⁰ <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2d1df4a6-66ae-11e7-b2f2-01aa75ed71a1>

⁴¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council - Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration (COM(2019) 126 final) and Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council - Enhancing legal pathways to Europe: an indispensable part of a balanced and comprehensive migration policy - A contribution from the European Commission to the Leaders' meeting in Salzburg on 19-20 September 2018, (COM(2018) 635).

<p>integration programmes are concerned.</p> <p>The EESC calls for safe, legal routes for refugees when they come to the EU. A coordinated approach from all Member States and European and national stakeholders, based on shared responsibility, fair allocation, convergence and respect for fundamental rights, is needed to include more options for family reunification, relocation and resettlement.</p>	<p>asylum policies.</p> <p>The Commission has also stressed⁴² that ensuring that all those who are rightfully and legitimately in the EU, regardless of the length of their stay, can participate and contribute is key to the future well-being, prosperity and cohesion of European societies.</p> <p>Legal migration pathways are also essential for the EU to be able to meet current and future needs for skills. For example, 40% of employers in the EU report that they encounter difficulties in finding employees with the required skills. There are important labour shortages at EU level in many sectors: information and communication technologies, health and care sectors, science and engineering, managers, etc.</p> <p>The EU has developed over the last 15 years common rules for the admission of third-country nationals in the EU for purposes of study, research, seasonal work and highly skilled work. There are also European-level rules on family reunification, long-term residence and a number of rights based on equal treatment with EU nationals. The Commission recently published a comprehensive evaluation ('fitness check') of this legal migration regulatory framework with the view to streamlining and simplifying it and will shortly present the results of, for further consultation.</p>
<p>Non-integration bears economic, socio-cultural and political risks and costs. Hence, investment in migrant integration is the best insurance policy against potential future costs, problems and tensions.</p> <p>Integration is a two-way process and the host community and migrants have rights and duties; therefore the responsibility</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee on the potential costs of non-integration of migrants and the need to promote integration to reinforce EU's fundamental values and principles. As stated in recent Communications⁴³, investing resources and energy in integration policies today will contribute to making Europe a more prosperous, cohesive, and inclusive society</p>

⁴² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals (COM(2016) 377 final).

⁴³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals (COM(2016) 377 final).

<p>needs to be shared between them both. It is neither fair nor sustainable to expect newcomers to integrate unaided in the face of considerable social, cultural, and economic barriers. To facilitate this process, public policies should tackle the fears, concerns and worries of diverse sections of the population in EU societies in order to avoid anti-EU and xenophobic discourses. To do so, the relevant policies should include a clear, consistent and reasoned set of obligations, as well as a consistent denunciation of anti-migrant rhetoric and behaviours.</p>	<p>in the long run. Failure to release the potential of third-country nationals in the EU would represent a massive waste of resources, both for the individuals concerned themselves and more generally for our economy and society. There is a clear risk that the cost of non-integration will turn out to be higher than the cost of investment in integration policies.</p> <p>The Commission also emphasised that in times when discrimination, prejudice, racism and xenophobia are rising, there are legal, moral and economic imperatives to upholding the EU's fundamental rights, values and freedoms and continuing to work for a more cohesive society overall.</p> <p>The successful integration of third-country nationals is a matter of common interest to all Member States.</p> <p>The EU has been supporting Member States in their integration policies for several years. In 2014, the Justice and Home Affairs Council reaffirmed the EU Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy, adopted in 2004, which set out a common approach to the integration of third country nationals across the EU. The first principle is that 'Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States'. This has been re-affirmed in the Action plan on integration in June 2016.</p> <p>The Commission is also promoting the integration of third-country nationals and social cohesion through EU Funding under the Asylum Migration Integration Fund and the European Social Funds and other relevant EU Funds, in particular the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme.</p>
<p>War, climate change and lack of prospects in third countries may create a continued and even increased influx of refugees and migrants. Limiting push factors for migration in general is a global challenge. There will be increased migration (including climate refugees) of all types due to the growing phenomenon of displaced people. For that, the EU must be</p>	<p>'Climate refugees' is a phrase that does not exist in international law. Such a protection ground is not covered by the 1951 Geneva Convention.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the UN Global Compact on Refugees recognizes that 'climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements'.</p>

<p>better prepared to coordinate their distribution across the Member States. The EESC has already highlighted how unbalanced economic processes can add to destabilisation in this context. Therefore the EESC supports the position that the Lisbon Treaty provides a sufficiently broad mandate to revise immigration policy in order to regulate the status of "environmentally displaced individuals".</p>	
<p>11. The EU Budget</p>	
<p>11.1 The EESC recognizes the high European added value of the programmes where the Commission's proposals for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 concentrate the main increases in expenditure (R+D+I, Erasmus+). However, the Committee questions the fact that these increases are made at the cost of substantial cuts to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), to cohesion policy and to the common agricultural policy (CAP), due to efforts to reduce the EU budget, which decreases from 1.16% of the gross national income (GNI) of the EU-27 in the current budget, to only 1.11% in the MFF post 2020.</p>	<p>The Commission's proposal combines new instruments with modernised programmes to deliver efficiently on the Union's priorities and to rise to new challenges.</p> <p>The Union budget will reflect the commonly agreed priorities by Leaders in Bratislava and Rome and that are more efficiently tackled at EU level (e.g., migration and border management, security, climate but also research, innovation, digital, Erasmus and others). Cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy will continue having a vital role to play for Europe's future. The Commission has proposed to modernise these essential pillars of the EU budget so that they continue to evolve in line with new priorities and the changing economic and social realities. Cohesion policy and common agricultural policy represent the biggest share of the EU budget, and, in view of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the Union, could not be exempted from moderate savings. Those savings do however not endanger the objective of these policies, which remain important.</p> <p>The EU budget in the current period, when including the European Development Fund, corresponds to 1.03% of the gross national income of the EU-28 and 1.16% of the gross national income of the EU-27. For the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, the Commission has proposed a level of 1.11% of the gross national income of the EU27.</p> <p>The departure of the United Kingdom, an</p>

	<p>important contributor to the EU budget, will have budgetary consequences, and the proposed new long-term budget takes account of that in a realistic and fair way. The Commission proposes a pragmatic approach. The shortfall arising from the United Kingdom's departure should be partly matched by new resources and partly by savings and redeployments from existing programmes. The Commission considers it is fair to split the Brexit gap equally into fresh money and redeployments. The EU's financial means should be aligned with the political objectives that Heads of State and Government have indicated, while giving due consideration to the financial impact of the United Kingdom's departure.</p>
<p>11.2 The EESC questions the proposed cuts in planned commitments for the CAP. These cuts will make it impossible to implement a model of sustainable rural development, a global objective of the new reform of the CAP, and other objectives included in the Commission's recent communication on the future of food and agriculture.</p>	<p>The Commission proposal for the next multi-annual financial framework has been drawn up in a very challenging budgetary context of the United Kingdom withdrawal from the European Union and the need to provide adequate financing for existing policies and new challenges. The Commission has proposed to reduce the amounts for the common agricultural policy (CAP) only moderately – by less than 5% compared to its EU-27 allocation in 2020. The Commission proposal for the next multiannual financial framework represents a fair outcome for agriculture and European farmers. It reflects the Commission's commitment to a strong, well-funded common agricultural policy.</p>
<p>11.3. Unfortunately, the Commission's proposal seems excessively geared towards preserving the status quo, and the EESC regrets the mismatch between the nature and scale of the new challenges facing the EU, and its ambitions, and the resources available to achieve them.</p> <p>11.4. People's distrust of national and European democratic institutions is leading to the rise of political movements that question democratic values and principles and the EU itself. Some of these political movements are now part of some EU Member States' governments.</p> <p>- To face the economic, social and</p>	<p>The Commission's proposals aim at modernising the budget by providing a significant and necessary boost to funding in key areas, such as innovation to the digital economy, training and employment for young people, climate action and the environment, migration and border management, security, defence and external action, while continuing investing in sustainable economic growth, as well as strengthening social and territorial cohesion. The proposal for a budget amounting to around 1.11% of the gross national income of the future Union at 27 is both ambitious and realistic.</p>

<p>environmental priorities, new as well as ongoing, the EU needs, in this politically critical moment, a strong EU Budget. The Commission proposal on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 is modest and unambitious. Like the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions, the EESC calls for resources to be set at 1.3% of GNI and for revenues to come mostly from the EU's own resources, establishing the tax figures proposed by the High Level Group on Own Resources (HLGOR), chaired by Mario Monti⁴⁴.</p>	<p>The Commission has proposed a basket of three new own resources that take into account the conclusions of the High Level Group on Own Resources. The new own resources are linked to climate policy, environmental objectives and the circular economy as well as corporate taxation and tax harmonisation. They thus display an unprecedented degree of interlinkage with EU priorities beyond the financing of the budget itself.</p> <p>According to current estimates, the proposed basket of new own resources would generate approximately 12% of the total revenues needed for the next multiannual financial framework.</p>
<p>- In the EESC's view, resources have to be transferred to the Member States in accordance with criteria of distributive justice to restore the path of economic and social convergence that was interrupted by the crisis⁴⁵.</p>	<p>This is also a concern of the Commission, which has been duly reflected in its proposals. Most notably, resources of the cohesion policy are proposed to be concentrated even more on the poorest regions of the EU. The distribution of cohesion resources also reflects the evolution of disparities in Europe, whereby support increases to those regions where economic conditions have worsened.</p>
<p>- The EESC considers it necessary for the next MFF to increase funding to allow for (i) the implementation by the Member States of the Gothenburg Declaration on the European Pillar of Social Rights to stimulate the creation of quality jobs in the context of sustainable development, (ii) the realisation of the UN Agenda 2030, and (iii) the implementation of the Paris Agreement promoting just transitions towards green and digitised societies.</p>	<p>In its proposal for the next multiannual financial framework, the Commission underlined the vital role of the Union budget in delivering on the commitment made by Leaders at the Gothenburg Social Summit in November 2017. Furthermore, the Commission's proposal for the next multiannual financial framework reflects the need for strengthening the social dimension of the Union, including through the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.</p> <p>The Commission proposed a dedicated budget of €101 174 million to address this. Those resources should allow the future European Social Fund+ to play a key role in increasing social cohesion across the</p>

⁴⁴ Final report and recommendations of the High Level Group on Own Resources on the Future financing of the EU, December 2016. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/mff/hlgor/library/reports-communication/hlgor-report_20170104.pdf

⁴⁵ EESC Opinion of 19 September 2018 on the 'Multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027'.

	<p>European Union and delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights.</p> <p>The Commission has also set a higher target of 25% for climate mainstreaming (compared to 20% in the current multiannual financial framework) to demonstrate the EU's commitment to the Paris Agreement and to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. This increased target is both more ambitious – as it will translate into €320 billion of expenditure contributing to climate objectives (€114 billion more than for the period 2014-2020) – and realistic – as it takes into account the experience with climate-related expenditure in the current period and the expenditure structure proposed for the next financial perspective.</p>
<p>- The EU needs ambitious budgets that are instruments of policies that develop a clear strategy for strengthening the Union, with more integration, more democracy, stronger support for civil society organisations both within the EU and outside it, greater support for companies in addressing environmental and digital challenges, a stronger social dimension and more support for rural life. Only in this way can the EU limit and overcome internal centrifugal forces and deal with external geopolitical risks.</p>	
<p>- The EESC supports the proposal to make the receipt of EU funds by the Member States conditional upon respect for the principle of the rule of law, a fundamental pillar of values of the Union according to Article 2 of the TEU.</p>	<p>The Commission thanks the Committee for its support.</p>
<p>12. Communication</p>	
<p>12.3. A comprehensive common communication strategy for all EU institutions, at all levels, including all civil society players, is urgently needed in order to combat this lack of information, as well as deliberately misleading information.</p>	<p>The Commission underlines that it is indeed crucial that European policy and governance are communicated in the overall perspective that there is only one Europe and not competing EU institutions.</p> <p>The Commission underlines the importance of linking communication and policy-making: In its Communication of 30 April 2019, 'Europe in May 2019 – Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world',</p>

12.4. An effective communication policy has to take the form of a real dialogue between those who provide the information and those who receive this information, to avoid a top-down approach.

the Commission is making a number of recommendations for the next strategic agenda:

1. Recognise that communicating about the European Union is a joint responsibility for EU Member States, governments at all levels and EU institutions alike.
2. Increase engagement and interaction with citizens about European Union policies and issues.
3. Ensure EU institutions work more closely together in the future on EU corporate communication campaigns based on shared European values.
4. Join forces to counter disinformation, with EU communication based on facts.
5. Promote teaching and learning about the European Union at all levels of education.

As policy and communication are the two sides of the same coin, the Communication is also setting out suggestions on how to better communicate our collective decisions to serve Europe's citizens and democracy. Both the priorities we set and the way we explain and engage with Europeans will be decisive in making our Union more united, stronger and more democratic⁴⁶.

The Commission supports this goal and is taking the Committee's opinion into account in this respect. To advance in this direction, at the start of the current Presidency term, the European Commission established a number of communication narratives (a EU that delivers, a EU that empowers and a EU that protects) reflecting citizens' concerns and interests and underpinned by the priorities of the Juncker Commission. In the run-up to the 2019 European elections, the European Commission worked in close cooperation with the European Parliament and other EU institutions and actors to encourage Europeans to go to the polls in May 2019.

⁴⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/files/europe-may-2019-preparing-more-united-stronger-and-more-democratic-union-increasingly-uncertain-world_en

	<p>Additionally, the Commission and the High Representative adopted, in December 2018, the Joint Communication setting out an ‘Action Plan against Disinformation’⁴⁷. The Action Plan focuses on how to deal with disinformation both within the EU and in its neighbourhood. In the implementation of the Action Plan, the European Commission works together with the European External Action Service to strengthen coordinated and joint responses to disinformation, to mobilise the private sector to make sure that it delivers on its commitments in this field, and to improve the resilience of society to the challenges that disinformation creates.</p> <p>The Commission underlines that it is indeed crucial that European policy and governance are communicated in the overall perspective that there is only one Europe and not competing EU institutions.</p> <p>The Commission endorses the opinion that an effective communication policy has to take the form of a real dialogue between the EU and its citizens. It has organized since January 2015 almost 1,600 Citizens’ Dialogues with some 200,000 citizens in nearly 600 cities across the Union. Since 2018, the Commission has also started to test bottom-up formats of dialogues. This led in cooperation with the Committee to the Citizens’ Panel on 5-6 May 2018, which elaborated the questionnaire for the one-year-long public online consultation on the future of Europe. Moreover, several forms of Citizens’ Workshops of 0.5-1 day with groups of citizens that reflect the diversity of European societies have taken place since the autumn 2018 and are currently evaluated under the aspect of mainstreaming more participatory elements into Citizens’ Dialogues.</p>
<p>12.5. Substantial, credible and lively information on European topics helps create awareness and to generate interest in European matters.</p>	<p>The Commission Representations provide outreach and communication services to citizens and stakeholders/multipliers in the Member States, by managing information networks and by explaining EU policies in a local context. In fulfilling their functions,</p>

⁴⁷ JOIN(2018) 36 final.

	<p>the Representations cooperate with other European institutions, especially the European Parliament Liaison Offices, and national, regional and local authorities in the Member States. They act on behalf of the Commission in carrying out the tasks arising from partnerships and cooperation established by the Commission with the Member States and the European Parliament.</p>
<p>12.6. The EESC, as a bridge between EU and its citizens and through its 350 members, should serve as a facilitator for such coordinated measures. The diversity of the EESC's members is a major advantage in terms of getting into contact with a maximum of citizens everywhere in Europe. In particular, more attention should be paid to youth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The pivotal role of the EESC in bridging the gap with European citizens must be better recognised and supported by the EU. - The EU must also decentralise its citizens' dialogues so that municipalities and regions can begin to develop a joint European purpose and identity. - EU policies should be much more responsive to proposals by citizens, communities and civil society organisations, giving them a reason to be involved. - The EESC should evaluate the implementation of EU policies in the Member States each year, on the basis of the policy objectives set out in this opinion, in order to provide concrete responses to citizens on the impact of EU membership on their daily lives. 	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's commitment to use the diversity of its members to reach out to a maximum of citizens. It also endorses the Committee's intention to intensify contacts with young people and appreciates the active involvement of the Committee's staff in the Back2School and Back2University initiatives, as well as the organisation of the Committee's annual youth event 'Your Europe, Your Say'.</p> <p>The Citizens' Dialogues of the Commission have taken place all over Europe in almost 600 cities.</p> <p>The Commission underlines the importance of linking communication and policy-making</p>

**N°2 The Future of the EU: Benefits to citizens and respect for European values (Exploratory opinion at the request of the Romanian Presidency)
EESC 2018/5821 – SC/852
542nd Plenary Session – March 2019
Rapporteur: Mihai IVAȘCU (Gr. III-RO)
SG – President JUNCKER**

Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential

European Commission position

Given that the Committee's opinion does not contain any specific request, a reply is deemed not necessary. Moreover, the Commission agrees with the thrust of the opinion and also with most of the details. Hence no follow-up needs to be given by the Commission.

<p>N°3 Towards a comprehensive EU framework on endocrine disruptors COM (2018) 734 final EESC 2018/5760 – NAT/754 542nd Plenary session – March 2019 Rapporteur: Brian CURTIS (Gr. II-UK) SG – Commissioners ANDRIUKAITIS/VELLA/BIENKOWSKA/MOEDAS/THYSSEN and Vice-President KATAINEN</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 (EESC) welcomes the Commission communication on Endocrine Disruptors (EDs) (...). In particular, the EESC considers it necessary to carry out a complete fitness check on current legislation, including the social and economic impact, in order to establish the real state of play. (...) Nevertheless, the Committee considers that this strategy should be reinforced with a realistic action plan which sets targets and deadlines.</p> <p>1.2. The Committee supports the proposal which aims to define a more coherent legislative framework. In this framework it will be important to respect the principle "<i>one substance, one toxicology</i>" and to base the new strategy on harmonised use of the <i>precautionary principle</i>, in line with the effective provisions already adopted on biocides and pesticides. The new strategy could be included under the "cross-sectoral umbrella" represented by REACH.</p>	<p>The Communication '<i>Towards a comprehensive European Union framework on endocrine disruptors</i>' confirms the Commission's commitment to protecting the citizens of the European Union and the environment from these substances, with the goal to minimise overall exposure. The Commission has identified a comprehensive set of actions with different timelines to step up the Union's efforts in the field and these are outlined in the communication.</p> <p>The Commission agrees that there should be coherence in the treatment of endocrine disruptors across different policy areas. However, before proposing changes to the legislation, we need to see whether and what changes are necessary. Regulating differently the same substance under different legislative measures does not mean incoherent treatment <i>per se</i>.</p> <p>For this reason, one of the actions announced in the communication is a cross-cutting fitness check of the relevant legislation to assess whether it delivers on its objectives, and analyse the coherence of the different</p>

	<p>approaches to endocrine disruptors in different sectors. The fitness check will address specifically two aspects: 1) the absence of horizontal criteria to identify endocrine disruptors in the different legal frameworks and 2) the different regulatory consequences for substances identified as endocrine disruptors in different policy areas. The fitness check will build on data collected and analysed in the context of relevant evaluations, such as the ongoing one on the Food Contact Materials legislation (to be finalised in the first quarter of 2020).</p> <p>The Commission services have already started working on the fitness check, with the goal of finalising it in 2020. Its outcome will feed into the reflection on whether legislative changes are needed.</p> <p>In autumn 2019, the Commission will organise the first meeting of the Annual Forum on endocrine disruptors and launch the web portal on these substances. Other actions, for example in the area of research, necessarily have a longer timeframe.</p>
<p>1.3. The mechanism of governance should be science-based, in order to ensure transparency for citizens and stakeholders. For this reason, public and independent research should be supported by an adequate budget. In particular, independent research could provide agreed scientific criteria and/or methods to address, support and stimulate European industrial R&I activity and production. The EESC recommends that this budget should not be lower than the current budget under Horizon 2020. In particular, the Committee recommends establishing a specific budget line for early identification of EDs and the</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of providing continued support to research on endocrine disruptors to constitute a strong basis for effective policy-making.</p> <p>Since 1999, the EU has funded over 50 relevant projects for an amount of over €150 million and the Commission allocated further €50 million under Horizon 2020 framework programme, allowing the funding of eight projects on new testing methods for endocrine disruptors.</p> <p>In the communication <i>'Towards a</i></p>

<p>risks for animal and human health, identification of safe alternative substances and environmental remediation.</p>	<p><i>comprehensive European Union framework on endocrine disruptors</i>, the Commission committed to continuing ensuring the necessary support to research on endocrine disruptors in its future framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe, building on the work under the current framework programme, Horizon 2020. Particular attention should be paid to areas where knowledge gaps on endocrine disruptors still exist, including testing methods to identify endocrine disruptors, understanding exposure and developing safer alternatives.</p> <p>Once the negotiations on the Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe are finalised, the Commission will be able to look more in detail into the question and be more precise in its strategic programming documents as regards budget and specific areas to finance.</p>
<p>4.8. The EESC supports the proposal for an Annual Stakeholder Meeting. Nevertheless, the Committee considers that the dialogue between stakeholders and the European Commission should include a permanent, structured system of information exchange and consultation, in order to be really effective. The EESC would like to participate in and contribute to the annual meeting.</p> <p>5.3. The EESC encourages the Commission to define more accurately the proposal to organise a public consultation on EDs. The Committee is convinced that more than individual people, organised civil society itself could play an important role, chiefly because specific knowledge</p>	<p>The Commission intends to follow an inclusive approach on endocrine disruptors that is open, transparent and brings together all interested parties.</p> <p>In this context, the Annual Forum on endocrine disruptors will be a flagship initiative to promote an active dialogue with interested stakeholders. The Commission will be happy to invite the Committee to the Forum's first meeting in autumn 2019.</p> <p>It should however be noted that the Commission's commitment to stakeholders consultation goes beyond the Annual Forum and constitutes one</p>

<p>and experience are necessary to give useful, reliable and science-based advice.</p>	<p>of the pillars of the Commission's Better Regulation guidelines.</p> <p>The Commission has a variety of tools in place to regularly exchange with interested stakeholders. By way of example, in the context of the Fitness check on endocrine disruptors, the Commission will hold a 12-weeks public consultation open to all interested parties, as well as targeted consultations with stakeholders. More information on the planned consultation activities can be found in the Roadmap⁴⁸ and the consultation strategy (still to be published).</p>
<p>1.6. The Committee asks that the broad awareness campaign on POPs which the Commission will be organising at EU level be developed with reference to a similar approach focused on EDs. The EESC also reiterates its recommendation to create an open data bank for POPs and EDs in order to provide a useful tool for enterprises and consumers.</p>	<p>Pursuant to Article 11 of the new Regulation on Persistent Organic Pollutants⁴⁹ published on 25 June 2019, the Commission, with the European Chemicals Agency and the Member States, will promote awareness campaigns on such pollutants, among others with regard to their health and environmental effects and their alternatives, for professionals and the public, in particular for vulnerable population groups.</p> <p>The Commission already operates online information platforms for chemicals, in particular (i) the Endocrine Active Substances Information System⁵⁰ on hazard data on endocrine active substances and (ii) the Information Platform for Chemical Monitoring⁵¹.</p> <p>Furthermore, the European Chemical Agency already publishes online</p>

⁴⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/ares-2019-2470647_en

⁴⁹ Regulation (EU) 2019/1021 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on persistent organic pollutants (Text with EEA relevance.), 25.6.2019, p. 45–77.

⁵⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/scientific-tool/endocrine-active-substances-information-system-easis>

⁵¹ <https://ipchem.jrc.ec.europa.eu/RDSIdiscovery/ipchem/index.html>

	<p>databases that provide information to enterprises and consumers about all substances, including those with endocrine disrupting properties.</p>
<p>1.8. The EESC supports the open strategy undertaken by the Commission and considers that organised civil society could play a crucial role in developing national awareness campaigns, in order to inform a wider population base about the activities taken by the EU to protect the health of citizens. Such initiatives should start in schools in order to reduce the risks of exposure to EDs and to promote safe behaviour. In particular, the EESC recommends that education and training initiatives be harmonised and considered part of the same strategy under a lifelong learning approach. Specific training courses should be compulsory and available for all European workers whose job is directly or indirectly related to EDs.</p>	<p>Public health protection remains primarily a competence of Member States and different sensitivities exist among Member States on endocrine disruptors. In line with subsidiarity considerations, the Commission considers that EU efforts should focus on areas where there is a real EU-added value, and this is primarily the provision of full information on EU actions on endocrine disruptors to all those interested in the topic. This is why the Commission will launch later in 2019 a one-stop shop web portal on endocrine disruptors.</p> <p>The Commission will of course also encourage exchange of best practices, for example in the context of the Annual Forum on endocrine disruptors.</p> <p>As regards training, under the Better Training for Safer Food initiative, the Commission has already organised training and plans to organise further activities for Member States' food safety authorities. Under REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals), the Commission supports training activities for enforcement authorities via the REACH Forum for Exchange of Information on Enforcement⁵².</p> <p>Concerning protection of workers, it is the employer's obligation to ensure that each worker receives adequate safety and health training, in particular in the</p>

⁵² <https://echa.europa.eu/about-us/who-we-are/enforcement-forum>

	form of information and instructions specific to his job.
<p>5.2. A well-designed circular economy, with a specific focus on secondary raw materials, could become a vehicle for minimising the exposure of EU citizens to endocrine disruptors. The Committee considers that the Commission proposal needs to be clearly and strictly linked to the current legislation developed under the 7th Environment Action Plan and the other crucial policy initiatives for sustainability, such as the Circular Economy Action Plan and the Plastic Strategy seeking to exclude the production of toxic products. This issue is very sensitive, particularly concerning cocktail effects which are a cause of disease in human beings and harmful for the environment.</p>	<p>The Commission would like to refer in particular to the communication adopted in 2018 on the <i>'implementation of the circular economy package: options to address the interface between chemical, product and waste legislation'</i> {COM(2018) 32 final}.</p> <p>The communication supports the objectives of the Circular Economy Action Plan of substituting substances of concern and, where this is not possible, reducing their presence and improving their tracking. It explores several critical issues in the way the legislation on chemicals, products and waste work together and presents options to address key questions in order to overcome these issues.</p>

<p>N°4 Clean air for all (communication) COM(2018) 330 final EESC 2018/3845 - NAT/751 539th Plenary Session - December 2018 Rapporteur: Octavian Cătălin ALBU (Gr. I-RO) SG – Commissioner VELLA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.2. The EESC considers that it is imperative to reduce pollution in the commercial, institutional, household and transport sectors. The institutions and Member States must set a good example here, and more support programmes must be set up to help individuals shift to clean, modern and more energy efficient forms of heating.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee’s opinion. The approach to European Union clean air policy, based on limit and target values for certain pollutants, incentivises Member States to study and target as a priority the most problematic sources of pollution and the sectors where action is the most cost-effective. Such actions can include support programmes to individuals and households.</p>
<p>1.4. The additional legislative measures proposed by the European Commission to remedy certain problems, such as Dieselpgate, or action taken against Member States which have failed to comply with current rules on air pollution are a step in the right direction and the EESC endorses this approach.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee’s support and notes that the Court of Justice of the European Union has already ruled on several cases, obliging the Member States to step up their implementation of the Ambient Air Quality Directive (2008/50/EC)⁵³.</p>
<p>1.5. The EESC firmly believes that the new environmental and transport regulations must be flanked by economic support measures to promote innovation and the development of new clean technologies, such as fuel cells, electric cars and alternative heating and ventilation systems.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee’s holistic take. The proposals for the next multiannual financial framework and the flagship research framework (Horizon) confirm the Commission’s support for financial and technological enablers in the struggle against air pollution.</p>
<p>1.7. International cooperation is crucial for combating pollution and climate change, and</p>	<p>The Commission shares the Committee’s view that there are</p>

⁵³ Directive 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe; OJ L 152, 11.6.2008, p. 1–44.

<p>the EESC welcomes the broad consensus among Member States on meeting the Paris Agreement objectives. The exchange of good practices in this area and the Green Diplomacy Network are very important. Furthermore, specific measures are needed to reduce pollutants in the Member States in order to meet the Agreement's targets.</p>	<p>synergies between the climate change and clean air policies. Progress towards meeting the Paris climate target is expected to also improve air quality. The Commission notes that, under the Energy Union Governance Regulation, the Member States have to submit , their first National Energy and Climate Plans by December 2019, after taking due account of the Recommendations issued by the Commission on the draft National Energy and Climate Plans. According to the content of the national plans prescribed by that Regulation, these plans must also address the links to air pollutant emissions. On 18 June 2019, the Commission published a communication⁵⁴ assessing the draft plans at the European level, as well as specific recommendations and assessments of each Member State's draft plan.</p>
<p>1.8. The EESC urges the Member States to cooperate closely, as this issue is critical for Europeans' health. The EESC also recommends that the Member States and the European Commission work as closely as possible with civil society and the representatives of local and regional civic organisations to develop and carry out environmental protection programmes as well as campaigns to educate, inform and raise awareness among the general public regarding air quality.</p>	<p>The Commission values the role of civil society and representatives of local and regional civic organisations in addressing air pollution. As part of the fitness check of the Ambient Air Quality Directives (2008/50/EC and 2004/107/EC⁵⁵), the Commission directly heard from such organisations from all corners of Europe during public workshops in June 2018 and January 2019, as well as through input via targeted questionnaires. Through the LIFE programme (European Union's funding instrument for the environment and climate action), the Commission supports non-government organisations</p>

⁵⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/energy-strategy-and-energy-union/governance-energy-union/national-energy-climate-plans>

⁵⁵ Directive 2004/107/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 relating to arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in ambient air; OJ L 23, 26.1.2005, p. 3–16.

	<p>active in air quality protection. Furthermore, via a European Air Quality Index, the European Environment Agency makes up to date air quality information more accessible to the general public⁵⁶.</p>
<p>3.3. The EESC would like to point out that in Central and Eastern Europe, millions of private residences rely on burning wood and coal for heating. According to the World Health Organization, in Central and Eastern Europe this practice contributes now and will contribute in future to PM2.5 pollution, which is still at 2010-2015 levels. More support measures are needed to engage the general public in shifting to cleaner forms of heating.</p>	<p>The Commission has identified solid wood burning as a particularly problematic source of air pollution in urban environments. The phenomenon disproportionately affects lower income regions and areas. EU legislation complements EU Clean Air Policy by further facilitating the shift to cleaner, more efficient forms of heating, e.g. the Ecodesign legislation to implement measures on solid fuel boilers, water heaters, etc.</p>
<p>3.6. The EESC recognises that in order to reduce the level of pollutants emitted by the commercial, institutional and household sectors, Member States, with support from the Commission, must decisively support and carry out improvements in buildings' energy performance, improve the performance of electricity and heating plants, extend and modernise urban centralised heating networks and support alternative air conditioning systems. One example here is the head office of the European Central Bank, which uses an innovative and environmentally friendly heating and ventilation system.</p>	<p>Increasing energy efficiency indirectly improves air quality, as less energy consumption from fossil fuels lowers the need for the combustion of these fuels, both locally and in power plants. The EU revised the Energy Performance of Buildings and the Energy Efficiency directives in 2018 as part of the Clean Energy for all Europeans package. These initiatives address the efficiency of buildings, of the wider energy networks and of the economy as a whole. Implementation, in particular via the National Energy and Climate Plans, will be key to unlocking clean air benefits.</p>

⁵⁶ see <http://airindex.eea.europa.eu>

<p>N°5 Sustainable mobility for Europe COM(2018) 293 final EESC 2018/3480 – TEN/666 538th Plenary Session – October 2018 Rapporteur: Giulia BARBUCCI (GR.II-IT) SG – Vice-President SEFCOVIC</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 Third Mobility Package, viewing it as a further step towards sustainable mobility for Europe. The EESC notes, however, that the Commission's proposal is limited almost exclusively to road transport. In order to develop effectively sustainable and safe mobility, a more ambitious project needs to be developed, taking all available forms of transport into consideration, with a particular focus on intermodality in freight and passenger transport.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's opinion on the Third Mobility Package and recalls its focus on achieving safe, connected and clean mobility. In this context, the road safety strategy was a top priority in this package, given the large number of fatalities and serious injuries that are caused by road traffic accidents. Furthermore, road transport is responsible for around three-quarters of greenhouse gas emissions from transport in Europe and CO₂ emissions performance standards for the post-2020 period, notably for heavy-duty vehicles, together with other clean mobility measures proposed by the Commission, are intended to address this. For example, the Strategic Action Plan for Batteries, adopted as part of this Third Mobility Package, will facilitate the roll-out of electric vehicles, thus contributing to the decarbonisation of mobility and improvements in air quality, notably in urban areas.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Third Mobility Package also includes several proposals with multimodal dimensions, or relevant for other transport modes, as well as road transport. This includes proposals aimed at enabling a fully digital and harmonised environment for information exchanges between transport operators and</p>

	<p>authorities. The proposed Regulations on a European Maritime Single Window Environment and on Electronic Freight Transport Information complement each other and will allow electronic and simplified exchanges between businesses and authorities along the transport routes. They will facilitate digital information flows for logistic operations, better connecting the different transport modes, and thus contributing to multimodal solutions.</p> <p>The Commission is in the process of evaluation the 2011 White Paper on Transport, which will provide an overall assessment of the broad range of measures and recommendations it announced and their impacts on mitigating the key challenges facing the sector.</p>
<p>1.2. The EESC considers that the Commission's proposals for safe, connected and clean mobility will require a huge economic effort, primarily on the part of the Member States, to make the necessary adjustments to physical and digital infrastructure (5G). It is therefore important that these initiatives be supported with sufficient funds for a prolonged period, setting realistic and achievable objectives.</p>	<p>The aim of the new Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for the period 2021-2027 is to accelerate investment in the field of trans-European networks and contribute to a modern, smart, sustainable, inclusive, safe and secure infrastructure. With a budget of €3 billion proposed by the Commission, the digital strand of Connecting Europe Facility 2 is intended to finance digital connectivity infrastructure and will also support, among others, key projects aligned with the 2016 Gigabit Society Strategy and essential for the success of the Digital Single Market, providing Gigabit connectivity for entities, which can influence important socio-economic developments, such as hospitals, medical centres, schools and research centres or deploying 5G networks along major transport routes.</p>

<p>1.3. The EESC welcomes the Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety and agrees with the Vision Zero target of zero deaths or serious injuries in road accidents by 2050. The Safe System method promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO) will certainly contribute to this aim by reducing the number of accidents and minimising injury to passengers and pedestrians. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for national laws on traffic rules and the corresponding sanctions to be harmonised and, at the same time, for the mandatory nature of motor vehicle safety devices to be extended to all public and private road vehicles for freight and passenger transport. Lastly, it is recommended that new, "safe" cars be affordable for consumers and businesses.</p>	<p>The Commission has considered that, given the diversity of traffic conditions across the European Union, traffic rules and their enforcement are best defined and implemented at national level. The Commission promotes the dialogue and exchanges of best practices in the High Level Group on Road Safety.</p> <p>Under the revised Vehicle Safety Directive, currently under discussion by the co-legislators – certain safety features may become mandatory for new vehicles. However, the expected benefits have to be weighed against the cost for drivers and transport undertakings of fitting these devices in existing vehicles. Finally it should be noted that the price of safe vehicles is not determined by public authorities at European Union or Member State level but by market forces.</p>
<p>1.4. Digitisation, connectivity and automation are the main tool for developing the Safe System method and moving towards the Vision Zero target. The EESC supports the project to build an automated, connected and safe road network. The Committee recommends that the Commission take account of the varying state of road and motorway infrastructure across the Member States and, in particular, envisage extending the project to urban centres, where most of the serious non-fatal accidents occur.</p>	<p>A shared responsibility and a coordinated action across public and private sectors is at the heart of the 'safe system' approach. Action taken at the most appropriate level ensures that the varying state of infrastructure is taken into account.</p>
<p>1.5. The Commission's proposal emphasises the importance of developing driverless vehicles and their role in increasing safety. However, it does not map out a detailed strategy towards autonomous transport; this approach is likely to aid progress in the field but might</p>	<p>The Commission is working in various areas to ensure a safe deployment of automation, which must take into account that traffic will be of mixed nature for the foreseeable future; highly and fully automated (driverless) vehicles should result in safer traffic for all users, and in</p>

<p>be problematic for Member States in terms of adapting their transport policies to new technologies and making use of these technologies. The EESC would also point to problems concerning the technological feasibility of ensuring maximum safety in a "mixed traffic" system (human, assisted and automated driving).</p>	<p>particular vulnerable road users.</p>
<p>1.6. Full vehicle automation raises numerous questions of ethics, economics, employment, social acceptance and legal liability. The EESC upholds the principle that only humans can, by definition, make "ethical" choices and that machines, however sophisticated, must operate alongside humans and not replace them. It is important for organised civil society to be fully involved in the governance of this process and that social dialogue and collective bargaining be applied to avoid possible negative effects on employment and workers.</p>	<p>The Commission is fully aware of these aspects related to the deployment of automation. As far as vehicle technology is concerned, its performance and certification will be carried out within the framework of vehicle regulations for type-approval. This process will ensure that automated vehicles conform to principles and standards which take ethics, liability and other societal concerns into account.</p> <p>The Communication on automated mobility (COM(2018) 283 final) refers to these issues, as well as the Communication on Artificial Intelligence in Europe (COM(2018) 237 final).</p>
<p>1.7. The EESC supports the proposals for more sustainable transport and the Strategic Action Plan for Batteries which aims to narrow the European energy gap and create a value chain for batteries. However, the Committee stresses that there is a range of factors inhibiting the plan's full fruition: reliance on third countries for raw materials; absence of alternative fuels; delays in managing, processing and disposing of used batteries; and the lack of a skilled workforce.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's support for its strategic approach to creating a value chain for batteries in Europe. This approach is helping to ensure that progress is made simultaneously on a variety of interlinked issues in a coordinated way. This includes developments in connected and automated vehicles, energy storage, the deployment of infrastructure, interoperability, trade, as well as jobs and skills. It is also helping key actors at different levels – both public and private sector, at European Union, national and regional level – to work better together to make it happen. New collaborative platforms and partnerships for</p>

	<p>cooperation with industry and stakeholders, taking into account the role of cities and regions are proving key to deliver on these objectives.</p> <p>Batteries are a key enabler for the transformation of the energy system and the decarbonisation of the entire European economy. Batteries are also critical to strengthening the Union's strategic autonomy in energy supply and critical raw materials. The Commission has highlighted that Europe must make sure that its current dependence on fossil fuels is not replaced by a critical dependence on primary raw materials and other processed materials along the battery value chain, sourced from abroad. The Commission is working closely with the Member States in an effort to diversify the sources of these materials, and strengthen the European Union's trade policy to ensure sustainable and secure supply. It is also seeking to deepen the shift towards a circular economy through recovery, re-use and recycling.</p>
<p>1.8. These factors mean that substantial investment in research and innovation is essential in order to identify new, fully renewable, zero-impact alternative fuels. It will be similarly important to invest in education and training, involving universities and research centres, if there is to be a skilled workforce.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee that in a highly competitive market such as batteries, research and innovation play a critical role and significant and sustained investments are needed, if Europe is to build its own battery 'ecosystem'.</p> <p>The European Union's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation for 2014-2020, Horizon 2020, has granted €1.34 billion to projects for energy storage on the grid and for low-carbon mobility. In 2019, Horizon 2020 included an additional call for battery projects worth €114 million for the European Battery Alliance, with more funding in 2020. For longer-term research, the Commission is</p>

preparing to launch a Future Emerging Technologies Flagship research initiative for research in advanced battery technologies for 2025 and beyond.

Grants are also available in the framework of the EU's European Regional Development Fund that has assigned an estimated €40 billion to supporting an energy-efficient and decarbonised transport sector including €12.4 billion for clean urban transport. It has also allocated €44 billion to over 120 Smart Specialisation Strategies. The EU's regions have shown an interest in establishing partnerships to take forward joint projects in the field of batteries research and innovation. One such interregional partnership, focusing on advanced battery materials for electromobility and energy storage, was launched in October 2018 in the framework of the Smart Specialisation Platform on industrial modernisation. The partnership has expanded to 22 regions.

In addition to research, demonstration projects and pilots are important to test out the new technologies in near-market conditions, prior to ramping up production on a commercial scale. To support first-of-a-kind commercial scale energy infrastructure demonstration projects, the European Investment Bank (EIB) provides loans, guarantees and equity-type funding through the InnovFin Energy Demo Projects (EDP) facility.

The estimated need for investment in alternative fuels infrastructure by 2020 is €5.2 billion and by 2025 is €16-22 billion.

Recognising that accelerating the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure is key to the widespread

	<p>development of a market for low- and zero-emission vehicles, under the second Mobility Package, the Commission adopted an Action Plan on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure. The Commission also announced an allocation of up to EUR 800m from CEF and NER300 to support this up to 2020. Under its proposals for CEF2, the Commission has proposed the general envelope of €12.8 billion for transport, which could be blended with other instruments and help leverage significant sums from the private sector (through loan guarantees, European Investment Bank etc.).</p>
<p>1.9. This replacement of the vehicle fleet will also give rise to the problem of disposing of and recycling a large part of the current vehicle fleet. This issue must be central to the Commission's circular economy strategies. Organised civil society should be involved at all stages of the transition process and is called on to inform and raise awareness among the public as part of the drive to achieve sustainable mobility.</p>	<p>Directive 2000/53/EU⁵⁷ on end-of-life vehicles sets the reuse/recycling/recovery targets for the end-of-life vehicles and provides for their treatment in environmentally safe facilities. The end-of-life vehicles Directive is currently under evaluation in view of its possible review by 31 December 2020, as stipulated in an amendments introduced through Directive 2018/849/EU of 30 May 2018⁵⁸. Attention should be paid to the feasibility of setting targets for specific materials (i.e. plastics). The European Strategy for Plastics (COM(2018) 28 final) also calls for actions to boost recycled content in the evaluation/review of the end-of-life vehicles Directive (Annex I).</p>

⁵⁷ Directive 2000/53/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 September 2000 on end-of life vehicles - Commission Statements; OJ L 269, 21.10.2000, p. 34–43.

⁵⁸ See: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/elv/index.htm>.

Directive (EU) 2018/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 amending Directives 2000/53/EC on end-of-life vehicles, 2006/66/EC on batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators, and 2012/19/EU on waste electrical and electronic equipment (Text with EEA relevance) PE/9/2018/REV/1; OJ L 150, 14.6.2018, p. 93–99.

<p>N°6 Action Plan against Disinformation JOIN(2018) 36 final EESC 2018/6302 – TEN/687 Rapporteur: Ulrich SAMM (Gr. I-DE) SG and EEAS – Vice-President MOGHERINI and Vice-President ANSIP</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.1. The EESC takes careful note of the initiative's definition of disinformation as verifiably false or misleading information that is a threat to democracy and does public harm. Spreading disinformation has become a part of a hybrid war with a clear political aim. However, it also emphasises that, in addition to false information, highly selective information, defamation, scare-mongering and inciting hatred attack citizens' fundamental rights (freedoms) and minority rights.</p> <p>1.2. The most effective disinformation always contains some truth. Therefore, multiple actions from all stakeholders are needed to provide quality information and raise awareness. To this end, the EESC welcomes the initiative for coordinated action to protect the EU, its institutions and its citizens against disinformation. The EESC emphasises the urgency of such measures but is also concerned, however, that the impact of this action plan might be limited given that the May 2019 European elections are not far off.</p>	<p>The Commission appreciates the support of the Committee for the Action Plan against Disinformation (JOIN(2018) 36 final, adopted on 5.12.2018).</p> <p>The Commission agrees with the Committee that disinformation is not limited to false information. It considers that the definition of the issue, contained in the Action Plan and in the Commission communication on tackling on-line disinformation⁵⁹, adopted in April 2018, to the extent that it includes true information that is used in a misleading way, is well-suited to capture this phenomenon.</p> <p>The Commission would like to refer to all the preparedness actions that it undertook to ensure the integrity of the elections as regards the monitoring of the compliance of the private sector with the Code of Practice, the strengthening of the cooperation between the European institutions and the national authorities, notably through the creation of the Rapid Alert System, as well as the measure more</p>

⁵⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach, COM(2018) 236 final.

	<p>strictly related to the elections included in the September 2018 package and the cyber security exercises. The progress achieved in the implementation of the Action Plan is set out in the Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan Against Disinformation (JOIN(2019) 12 final, adopted on 14.06.2019).</p> <p>The Commission would like to stress, however, that disinformation requires a long-term solution and that its commitment to fight against disinformation is a long term one.</p>
<p>1.5. The EESC shares the Commission's view that a comprehensive response to disinformation also requires active participation by civil society organisations. The EESC is pro-active in supporting the joint efforts against disinformation, for example through its opinions, hearings, going local events and numerous press activities by its professional Communication Group.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with these statements and thanks the Committee for its support.</p>
<p>1.6. Building resilience means involving all sectors of society and, in particular, improving citizens' media literacy. Awareness-raising and critical thinking start at school but also require a continuous lifelong refresher. These activities require allocation of proper funding – right now and in the new Multiannual Financial Framework.</p>	<p>The Commission confirms the importance of involving all sectors of society in the fight against disinformation.</p> <p>The Commission is thus proposing a dedicated budget in the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 (Creative Europe, Cross sectorial strand) to substantially increase its funding and stabilise actions in favour of quality journalism, media freedom, media pluralism and media literacy. Erasmus will also continue to fund projects focusing on the development of critical thinking. It covers lifelong learning and should have a significantly increased budget under the next Multiannual Financial</p>

	<p>Framework.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission would like to refer to awareness raising actions aimed at increasing societal resilience to the negative effects of disinformation and sensitising European citizens to the significance and positive impact of EU policies and values. Such actions include, inter alia, its corporate communication campaigns InvestEU, EUandME and EU Protects and the positive communication campaigns conducted by the European External Action Service in the EU's neighbourhood and to the EU audiences.</p>
<p>1. 7 Joint efforts have to be supported by as many actors as possible at EU level, in Member States and also within the southern and eastern partnership involving public and private organisations. Independent fact-checkers and quality journalism play a key role and need proper funding to be able to operate almost in real time.</p> <p>1.8 The EESC welcomes, in particular, the research funding allocated in Horizon 2020 and in Horizon Europe to achieve a better understanding of the sources of disinformation and the intentions, tools and objectives behind disinformation.</p>	<p>The Commission confirms the importance to supporting the growth of the fact-checking community in Europe. To this end, the Horizon 2020 project Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media (SOMA) is providing, free of charge, tools and services for fact-checking activities. Moreover, the Commission, through a new Digital System Infrastructure of the Connecting Europe Facility Programme, will deploy a European platform on disinformation. This platform that will connect national independent multidisciplinary teams of fact-checkers and academic researchers, which will foster the capacity to detect, analyse and expose disinformation campaigns. The Action Plan calls on Member States to support the creation of such teams.</p> <p>This platform will also provide testing capabilities for new tools and services developed by other Horizon2020 projects like WeVerify, Provenance,</p>

	SocialTruth and Eunomia.
<p>1.9. The strengthening of the Strategic Communication Task Forces is overdue. The EESC therefore welcomes the plan to provide additional staff and new tools. In view of the considerable resources provided in certain countries for the generation of disinformation, it appears that the EU needs an adequate response. Therefore the anticipated increase of resources for the Strategic Communications Task Forces can thus only be seen as a first step towards further growth in the years to come.</p> <p>1.10 The EESC agrees that the other two Strategic Communications Task Forces (Western Balkans and South) should be reviewed, and urges the Member States to contribute to the work of the Strategic Communications Task Forces by sending national experts. Increased spending on youth work along with long-term investments in public services need to be encouraged, especially where there have been cuts in public services.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with these statements. Following the adoption of the joint Action Plan against Disinformation, a two-stage approach to improve the European External Action Service capabilities to detect, analyse and expose disinformation has been implemented. In the short term, 11 contractual agent posts were created, with 9 posts allocated and recruited for disinformation officers, data scientists and campaign managers, one to support the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell and one post for the Rapid Alert System operations support. In the medium term, resources for the implementation and sustainability of the Action Plan have been requested as part of the EU budget 2020, with an aim to secure the budget and posts to reinforce 27 EU Delegations in the EU's Eastern and Southern neighbourhood and Western Balkans and create additional posts at the headquarters of European External Action Service from 2020.</p> <p>A €1.1 million Preparatory Action under 2018 budget (increased to €3 million in 2019) was launched to further develop professional monitoring of the information environment. A team of over 20 external experts was contracted to support the work of the East Stratcom Strategic Task Force by providing tailored media monitoring and big data analytics aimed at detecting and exposing disinformation.</p>
<p>1.11. The EESC welcomes the Code of Practice as a voluntary commitment for social media platforms and advertisers to fight disinformation, but at the same time</p>	<p>The Commission recalls that it will assess the Code of Practice by the end of 2019 and propose new measures, including of a regulatory nature, if such</p>

<p>has doubts about the effectiveness of such voluntary actions. The Commission is urged to propose further actions, including actions of a regulatory nature like penalties, should the implementation of the Code of Practice continue to be unsatisfactory.</p> <p>1.12 The EESC urgently appeals to private businesses to start seeing the placing of advertisements on online platforms contributing to spreading disinformation as unethical and irresponsible, and urges them to take steps to prevent this behaviour.</p>	<p>measures were not to be considered sufficient.</p> <p>The Commission welcomes the Committee support in mobilising the private sector.</p>
<p>4.4. The EESC emphasises that it is urgent that Member States take the steps needed to preserve the integrity of their electoral systems and infrastructure and test them ahead of the European elections, but also during and after the electoral process. It is crucial that the European Commission supports them in this task. Exchange of best practices, such as the Swedish example from 2018, should serve as a model for this.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with these statements. The Commission is supporting such exchanges among the Member States, notably within the European election network set up pursuant to the 2018 Election package, and which has met three times in 2019 in view of the European elections.</p>
<p>4.7 Joint efforts have to be supported by as many actors as possible at EU level, in Member States and also within the southern and eastern partnership involving public and private organisations. Independent fact-checkers and quality journalism play a key role and need proper funding to be able to operate almost in real time.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with these statements and in particular on the key role played by fact-checkers and quality journalism. The Action Plan calls on Member States to support quality journalism.</p> <p>The Action Plan also calls on Member States to support the creation of national independent multidisciplinary teams of fact-checkers and academic researchers. Such teams, which will be networked through the new European platform on disinformation, will provide knowledge on local information environment that is needed to effectively tackle disinformation at national or regional level.</p>

5.1 The strengthening of the **Strategic Communications Task Forces** is overdue, as already expressed in former opinions⁵. The EESC therefore welcomes the plan to provide additional staff and new tools and signs up to the request to the Member States to upgrade, where appropriate, their national capacity in this area as well. In view of the considerable resources provided in certain countries for the generation of disinformation, it appears that the EU needs an adequate response; the anticipated increase of resources for the Strategic Communications Task Forces can thus only be seen as a first step towards further growth in the years to come.

5.2 The EESC agrees that the mandate of the East Strategic Communication Task Force should be maintained and that of the other two Strategic Communications Task Forces (Western Balkans and South) should be reviewed in the light of the growing scale and importance of disinformation activities in those regions. The EESC urges the Member States to contribute to the work of the Strategic Communications Task Forces by sending national experts. Only then can the Rapid Alert System be truly efficient.

5.3 The EESC also welcomes the urgently needed measures to secure free and fair European elections and the recommended use of sanctions where appropriate, including for the illegal use of **personal data** to influence the outcome of the elections. It also welcomes the good cooperation with the US, NATO and Norway and demands that the important role of the UK be preserved whether or not Brexit takes place. The fight against disinformation has to be fought in in **solidarity** between Member States.

The Commission welcomes the Committee support to the strengthening of the Strategic Communication Task Forces in line with the planning of resources outlined under point 1.9.

The activities of Task Forces for the Western Balkans and South have been reviewed in the light of the growing scale of disinformation activities in those regions.

The Commission welcomes the Committee's support and it backs the Committee's request to the Member States. The Commission agrees with the Committee that the fight against disinformation has to be fought in cooperation and solidarity with Member States.

5.5. The EESC welcomes the Code of Practice, but at the same time has doubts regarding the effectiveness of such **voluntary** actions, doubts which were also expressed recently by the Commission at the presentation of the first report given by Google, Facebook, Twitter and Mozilla on January 29. The Commission is urged to propose further actions, including actions of a **regulatory** nature, like imposing penalties in case countermeasures against fake accounts aren't implemented fast enough or the execution of other parts of the Code of Practice continues to be unsatisfactory.

5.6 The EESC urgently appeals to private businesses to start seeing the **placing of advertisements** on online platforms contributing to spreading disinformation as unethical and irresponsible, and urges them to take steps to prevent this behaviour.

The Commission refers the Committee to the most recent press releases and reports showing the progress made by the platforms in the implementation of the Code of Practice.

The Commission recalls that it will assess the effectiveness of the Code of Practice by the end of 2019 and propose, if needed, further initiatives including of a regulatory nature.

The Commission agrees with these statements and welcomes the Committee's call to the private businesses.

<p>N°7 Digital health literacy EESC 2019/67 - INT/874 542nd Plenary Session – March 2019 Rapporteur - Renate HEINISCH (GR. III-DE) DG CNECT – Commissioner GABRIEL</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.1.1. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) endorses the European Commission's efforts to make Digital Health Literacy a high priority within the eHealth Agenda. The EESC recommends the development of an overarching EU strategy with clear and closely monitored health literacy targets to support people's rights in health and avoid inequalities through digital devices.</p>	<p>The Commission addresses digital health literacy through the e-health action plan, and more recently the Communication on enabling the digital transformation of health and care (COM(2018)233 final), as well as under the European Pillar of Social Rights.</p> <p>Coordination and support actions are funded currently under the Horizon 2020 programme, providing for stakeholder involvement, dissemination and broad outreach, such as the action DigitalHealthEurope. In the future, the proposal for the Horizon Europe programme foresees activities on health education and digital health literacy in the health cluster, for example in area 1 of 'Health throughout the Life Course'.</p>
<p>2.1.4. The EESC recommends widening efforts to include digital information about medicines and medical devices and engaging every organisation that might contribute. The EESC recommends establishing a link to the efforts made by the European Medicines Agency EMA, Heads of Medicines Agencies (HMA) and the European Commission.</p>	<p>In its e-health action plan and the Communication on enabling the digital transformation of health and care (COM(2018)233 final) the Commission addresses pharmaceuticals and medical devices. The Commission has strengthened the European regulatory framework for medical devices and in vitro diagnostic medical devices</p>

	<p>correspondingly by the regulation (EU) 2017/745⁶⁰ and regulation (EU) 2017/746⁶¹.</p> <p>The active involvement of stakeholders is also addressed under Horizon 2020 research, specifically in call for innovation action under H2020-Societal challenge-1 (call number DTH-09). The EU-wide implementation of International Standards Organisation’s standards for identification of medicinal products (IDMP) is currently under way by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the EU Regulatory Network to comply with the EU Pharmacovigilance legislation. This action aims at enabling and fostering the use of a common EU Medicinal Product Repository to address and support implementation of ePrescription/ eDispensation between Member States and in a cross-border setting. Under Horizon Europe, the Health cluster plans to strengthen the collaboration with such stakeholders, e.g. in area 5 ‘Tools, Technologies and Digital Solutions for Health and Care’.</p>
<p>3.3.1. The question of literacy and skills promotion becomes all the more prevalent against the background of the recognised societal challenge of demographic change. In order to maintain the sustainability of health and care systems, our rapidly ageing society requires extra-training of health and care staff, to ensure that their skills correspond to new needs, and optimal</p>	<p>The Commission supports the Active and Assisted Living Programme, a public-public partnership, which aims to create better quality of life for older people and to strengthen industrial opportunities in the field of healthy ageing technology and innovation. This programme addresses different topics and some project calls have specifically</p>

⁶⁰ Regulation (EU) 2017/745 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2017 on medical devices, amending Directive 2001/83/EC, Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 and Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 and repealing Council Directives 90/385/EEC and 93/42/EEC (Text with EEA relevance.), OJ L 117, 5.5.2017, p. 1-175

⁶¹ Regulation (EU) 2017/746 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2017 on in vitro diagnostic medical devices and repealing Directive 98/79/EC and Commission Decision 2010/227/EU (Text with EEA relevance.), OJ L 117, 5.5.2017, p. 176–332.

<p>management of health expenditure, in addition to the advancement of digital literacy among the population at large.</p>	<p>focused on communication, including digital literacy, through ICT (Information and Communication Technology) platforms for the elderly.</p> <p>More widely, the programme actively involves end-user organisations in the design and development of new products and services for older people. Since 2008 over 220 projects were funded addressing a number of issues, including management of chronic conditions, social inclusion, access to online services, mobility, management of daily activities, and support from informal carers.</p> <p>In general, the Commission seeks to stimulate the work on digital skills of healthcare professionals. Training in digital knowledge and skills should become a new core component of training for future and current doctors in all Member States, as agreed by representatives of students/junior doctors and deans, gathered at the initiative of the Commission and Erasmus University Hospital on 12 April 2019 in Rotterdam. A set of recommendations for action were developed at this meeting, and participants committed themselves to taking them forward in their own national context to raise policy makers' awareness. Moreover, the Commission has proposed to set aside ca. €700 million in support of advanced digital skills under the forthcoming Digital Europe programme.</p>
<p>4.3.2. The EESC supports the European Commission's activities to promote citizens' empowerment that concentrate on the transformation of the health system. However, the EESC is of the view that</p>	<p>The Commission agrees as to the importance of enabling citizens to use digital tools.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Commission's</p>

<p>concurrently citizens need to be enabled to use these digital tools; an action plan for the improvement of both health literacy and digital health literacy needs to be implemented across the Member States.</p>	<p>proposal for the European Social Fund Plus⁶² includes that it should promote the development of digital skills for all, and improve health literacy for all. Furthermore, the Horizon Europe programme plans activities on digital health literacy, patient empowerment and the transformation of health systems in the Health cluster, for example in area 1 (Health throughout the Life Course) and area 6 (Health Care Systems).</p>
<p>5.3.5. The EESC recommends referring to IC-Health results for further implementation of the EU Commission's E-health priorities for increased awareness of e-health solutions published in the April 2018 communication. Horizon 2020 Europe should follow up actions and conclusions to be drawn from the project and use experience gained from the MOOCs.</p>	<p>The Horizon 2020 IC-Health project has been finished successfully and a sustainability strategy has also been prepared. Its results may be considered as a basis for future work and a possible follow-up may be further explored regarding digital health literacy.</p>
<p>6.4.1.2. The survey results during the IC-Health project show in some cases, for example, that young people and other people with lower literacy levels may prefer mobile devices to web-based sources on the computer. The EESC proposes that these aspects be further explored and included in the considerations underlying future programmes.</p>	<p>The Commission acknowledges the widespread interest in mobile health applications. To follow up on the results of the consultation on the mobile Health Green Paper, the Commission has supported European initiatives such as an industry-led Code of Conduct for mobile health apps and mobile health assessment guidelines. The Commission supports the eHealth network subgroup on mobile health, led by Member States representatives, as well as the mobile Health Hub, a project funded by the Horizon 2020 programme, involving the World Health Organisation.</p>

⁶² Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund Plus (ESF Plus), COM (2018) 382 final.

<p>N°8 The digital revolution in view of citizens' needs and rights EESC 2018/4168 - TEN/679 541st Plenary session – February 2019 Rapporteur: Ulrich SAMM (GR. I-DE) DG CNECT – Commissioner GABRIEL</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.6 The EESC welcomes the approach of improving road safety by introducing more digital technology in cars, but also expresses worries about the slow pace of these improvements. To accelerate the transition to more automatic driving, the EESC calls for the development of EU-incentives to address the demanding costs (need to buy new cars) and the insufficient acceptance of assistance systems (complexity, lack of training). The EESC believes that a European strategy must be developed to adapt and modify our road system so that fully autonomous vehicles with 100% safety can become a success.</p>	<p>The Commission has adopted a Communication 'On the road to automated mobility: An EU strategy for mobility of the future' {COM(2018) 283} in May 2018. With this Communication, the Commission proposes a comprehensive EU approach towards connected and automated mobility setting out a clear, forward looking and ambitious European agenda. This agenda provides a common vision and identifies supporting actions for developing and deploying key technologies, services and infrastructure. It will ensure that European Union legal and policy frameworks are ready to support the deployment of safe connected and automated mobility, while simultaneously addressing societal and environmental concerns which will be decisive for public acceptance.</p> <p>In March 2019 the Commission launched a call for interest to establish a platform in the field of testing and pre-deployment activities for connected and automated mobility⁶³. The role of the platform will be to monitor the state-of-play of testing and pre-deployment activities in Europe, produce reports, conclusions, and recommendations, and facilitate the exchange of best practices among private</p>

⁶³ https://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/road/news/2019-02-26-call-applications-single-platform_en

	<p>and public stakeholders with a view to tackling the outstanding issues.</p>
<p>1.7 The EESC calls for the GDPR to be adapted and overhauled in view of the fast-changing digital technology. New facial recognition technologies, in particular, are a threat to our privacy. As this technology becomes cheaper and easily accessible to all, it could ultimately lead to a situation where it is no longer possible to walk down the street or go shopping anonymously. The threat to privacy and autonomy is even greater when these technologies are used for profiling or scoring. The EESC insists that people should have the right to be private in public spaces too. The EESC urges the Commission to regularly revise the GDPR and related regulations depending on how fast these technologies change.</p>	<p>The EU has enacted comprehensive legislation to protect individuals whose personal data are processed, in particular the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which came into application on 25 May 2018. The new legislation modifies and updates data protection rules at EU level to make Europe fit for the digital age. The Commission underlines that the GDPR has been designed as technologically neutral and that its rules therefore apply to the processing of personal data in all kind of technologies, existing and future ones.</p> <p>The General Data Protection Regulation was adopted after four years of intense negotiations by the co-legislators, and a transition period of 2 years was provided for before it entered into application. As laid down in Article 97 of the Regulation, by May 2020 and every four years thereafter, the Commission shall submit a report on the evaluation and the review of the Regulation to the European Parliament and to the Council.</p>
<p>3.4 Huge amounts of data from sensors and platform activities (big data) will be processed by computer programmes based on certain algorithms. Programmers will be able to either narrowly define these algorithms, or generate them dynamically using a set of input data (machine learning or AI). From AI, in particular, many are expecting significant technological breakthroughs. The question how far we allow machines to make choices (with moral implications) is of crucial importance and requires social and political control.</p>	<p>The High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence (AI) set up by the Commission developed ethics guidelines to address this and other issues related to the novel challenges arising from the development and use of artificial intelligence.</p> <p>The outcome was published in the Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence in April 2019. The Expert Group suggested a set of principles for AI practitioners, as well as seven more detailed requirements and an assessment list with 131 questions. These serve to</p>

<p>There is already a strong demand for limitations to be placed on automatic computer systems in certain areas (such as fintech) because of a significant loss of control and lack of transparency.</p> <p>4.3 "Man-out-of-the-loop" refers to full automation, where the system makes a decision without human intervention. Examples include knowledge systems that make medical diagnoses based on a large amount of information, or military robots that make life or death decisions using information from various sources. The crucial, frequently asked question is: to what extent is it ethically acceptable to delegate making choices (with moral implications) to systems based on AI? The EESC has already expressed a clear view on this: the terms "responsibility" and "moral" are exclusively linked to human beings, while certain mental or personality traits cannot be attributed to robots. Automated systems, regardless of how complex they are, have to operate according to the human-in-command principle. Only humans make the final decision and take responsibility for it.</p>	<p>assess if an artificial intelligence system can be considered trustworthy. Two of the seven requirements address the questions of control and transparency: human agency and oversight, and transparency. Artificial intelligence systems should allow for human oversight, which helps ensure that these systems do not undermine human autonomy or cause other adverse effects. Transparency encompasses the elements relevant to an artificial intelligence system – the data, the system and the business models – and it includes traceability, explainability and communication (of whether humans are interacting with an artificial intelligence system).</p> <p>The Commission welcomed the seven requirements for trustworthy artificial intelligence in its communication entitled Building Trust in Human Centric Artificial Intelligence {COM(2019) 168 final} of 8 April 2019.</p>
<p>3.6 A typical example of the Internet of Things with limited acceptance is home automation or smart home systems, to control lighting, heating, entertainment devices or units, household appliances and much more. Access control and alarm systems with security cameras can upload videos. Home automation systems lack technical standards, making it hard to develop applications that work consistently for different objects. They may also require advanced skills and continuous updating. Another difficulty lies in the fact that most homes are shared environments,</p>	<p>The Commission is committed to improving the uptake and trust of Internet of Things (IoT) by citizens. One of the pillars of the EU's IoT implementation strategy concerns standardisation and interoperability.</p> <p>The Internet of Things and Digital European Industry focus areas under Horizon 2020 are deploying several large-scale pilot projects in the areas of particular interest for the citizens, such as smart cities, health, wearables, and smart energy.</p> <p>Based on real use cases, they are</p>

<p>with people who have different interests, skills and abilities (children, older people and guests, for example). It is much easier to live in a smart home that manages the life of one person.</p>	<p>addressing the technology aspects, piloting new interoperability standards, but also the regulatory and societal issues around Internet of Things (privacy, security) and are documenting how technology, digitisation and in particular Internet of Things are contributing to solve societal challenges.</p> <p>Our target is to link and align these activities to our Digital European Industry Strategy, fostering the take-up of Internet of Things in Europe and enabling the emergence of Internet of Things ecosystems supported by open technologies and platforms.</p> <p>In addition, in order to contribute to creating an environment of trust, the Commission is currently assessing whether the safety and national and EU liability frameworks are fit for purpose in light of the challenges posed by the artificial intelligence or whether any gaps should be addressed. The Commission has set up an Expert Group for Liability and New Technologies. Building on this Expert Group's assistance, the Commission will in 2019 issue guidance on the Product Liability Directive and a report on the broader implications for, potential gaps in and orientations for, the liability and safety frameworks for artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and robotics.</p>
<p>4.4.1 As hot new gadgets make our homes smarter, they are also making them more vulnerable. With more of our devices connecting to the internet – smart TVs, webcams, gaming consoles, smartwatches – it is crucial to have a good defence plan for your home network. Smartwatches and other wearable devices are an extension of a smartphone, giving instant access to</p>	<p>To provide Europe with the right tools and instruments to address the near exponential growth in cyber-attacks, in 2017 the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy proposed a wide-ranging set of measures to build strong cybersecurity in the EU. On 10 December 2018 the European Parliament and the</p>

powerful apps, emails, text messages and the web. Besides extracting information that is valuable to hackers, they can also **take over control** of smart devices. Security researchers have demonstrated how simple it is to hack the toy doll Cayla or that one could hack even an insulin pump or spy on a smartwatch wearer. Consumers have to be made aware of these risks. The EESC calls on the EU to revisit existing security regulations and to develop and adapt strict security rules for new evolving technologies for the protection of citizens in their homes.

4.6.3 With more **home automation**, the home, considered private, is becoming more transparent. The distinction between home and the outside world is blurring, as the walls no longer protect a house from prying eyes. Entertainment devices, alarm systems with security cameras and central control systems (desktop computer, smartphone, smart speaker) provide a range of entry points for hackers. The EESC calls for EU coordinated action to inform consumers about these risks and provide support for security measures.

Council reached a political agreement on the proposed Cybersecurity Act which will reinforce the mandate of the EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and establish an EU framework for cybersecurity certification. The Regulation was formally adopted in the European Parliament on 12 March 2019 and in the Council on 9 April 2019 and published in the Official Journal on 7 June 2019⁶⁴.

The establishment of an EU cybersecurity certification framework will contribute to the trustworthiness of the billions of Internet of Things devices which drive today's critical infrastructures, such as energy and transport networks, and also new consumer devices, such as connected cars. The EU cybersecurity certification framework creates a comprehensive set of rules, technical requirements and standards. The resulting certificate will be recognised in all Member States, making it easier for consumers and purchasers to understand the security features of the product or service and for businesses to trade across borders in the internal market.

Thus, governments, citizens and end-users (e.g. operators of essential services) will be able to make more informed purchase decisions related to ICT products and services that they rely upon.

At the same time, and as depicted in the Cybersecurity Act, the EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) will promote a high level of cybersecurity awareness, including 'cyber hygiene' and cyber literacy among citizens and businesses.

Cybersecurity is not just a technology issue, but human behaviour is equally

⁶⁴ [O.J. L.151, 07.06.2019, p.15](#)

	<p>important. Therefore, ‘cyber hygiene’, is understood as simple routine measures that, when implemented and carried out regularly by citizens, organisations and businesses, minimise their exposure to risks from cyber threats.</p> <p>The Commission also proposed to create a Network of Competence Centres and a European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre {COM(2018) 630 final} to develop and roll out the tools and technology needed to keep up with an ever-changing threat.</p>
<p>4.6 Privacy</p> <p>4.6.1 Facial recognition compares someone's facial profile with a database to see if the scanned person appears in that database. It is used in police investigations or for security cameras in public spaces and its use is regulated by law. Such highly sensitive information must be stored safely and securely. Facial recognition, however, will become cheaper and easily accessible to all, for any shop, business or even private individual to use. There are attempts to use these techniques even for emotional recognition. The fear is that facial recognition technology could ultimately lead to a situation where it is no longer possible to walk down the street or go shopping anonymously. The EESC demands that people have the right to be private in public spaces too. In general, camera recognition, without the knowledge of the people being observed, must be prohibited.</p> <p>4.6.2 While the big brother scenario, where a government is spying on everyone, is already well known, the little</p>	<p>Any use of facial recognition and of new emerging technologies which relies on the processing of personal data must be done in compliance with the rules laid down in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This includes notably carrying out a Data Protection Impact Assessment when the processing is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of natural persons; in case the Impact Assessment indicates that the processing would result in a high risk in the absence of measures taken by the controller to mitigate the risk, the competent data protection authority must be consulted prior to the processing.</p> <p>Concerning the complexity of the information provided to users on the processing of their personal data, the Regulation now requires that any information on the processing is concise, transparent, intelligible and in an easily accessible form (Article 12(1) of the GDPR).</p> <p>Platforms, like any other players processing personal data of individuals in the EU, are subject to the General Data</p>

brother scenario, where individuals or small companies are spying on each other, is becoming an ever greater possibility. For example, smart glasses can be used to record and retrieve data about an interlocutor or visitor. Other electronic spying gadgets will appear as advanced and affordable technology is further developed. The EESC emphasises that beyond the present GDPR, we need clear, strict rules to safeguard people's privacy.

4.6.3 With more home automation, the home, considered private, is becoming more transparent. The distinction between home and the outside world is blurring, as the walls no longer protect a house from prying eyes. Entertainment devices, alarm systems with security cameras and central control systems (desktop computer, smartphone, smart speaker) provide a range of entry points for hackers. The EESC calls for EU coordinated action to inform consumers about these risks and provide support for security measures.

4.6.4 One risk of digital systems lies in their complexity. In particular, the individual consumer, who does not have professional digital skills, needs strong support. For example, user manuals for digital equipment can be very long. They normally warn the user about privacy issues, but permission to use certain data is often given unwittingly, because people are not able to understand the entire manual or are suffering from so-called consent fatigue, due to the many times they have to grant permission to use their data to devices that capture data.

Protection Regulation. They must therefore implement appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure and to be able to demonstrate that processing is performed in accordance with the Regulation ('accountability principle' in Articles 5(2) and 24 of the GDPR). This includes, amongst others, implementing the appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure a level of security appropriate to the risk, in accordance with Article 32.

The monitoring and enforcement of the application of the data protection legislation falls under the competence of national authorities, in particular the independent data protection authorities and courts.

Moreover, also Directive 2002/58/EC⁶⁵ provides for rules on data protection and privacy, specific for the electronic communications sector. Among other things, it includes rules on the protection of terminal equipment information. The Directive provides that the storing of information (e.g., tools to track a user) and accessing of information already stored in terminal equipment (e.g., photos stored in a smartphone) requires the subscriber's or user's consent, as defined in the General Data Protection Regulation, or it must be strictly necessary in order for the provider of an information society service explicitly requested by the subscriber or user to provide the service. Any storage or access technically necessary for the communication to take place is unaffected. The proposal for a Regulation

⁶⁵ Directive 2002/58/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 July 2002 concerning the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the electronic communications sector (Directive on privacy and electronic communications) (OJ L 201, 31.7.2002, p.37), amended by Directive 2009/136/EC.

<p>This raises the question of where the responsibility lies in this process. The EESC calls for simplification and proposes to introduce EU standard procedures or standard privacy packages which are easy to understand for all.</p> <p>4.6.5 The issue of privacy also applies to digital platforms. Platforms can easily track their users with simple tools. For example, Uber employees have been using the company's God View tool to track politicians, celebrities and others, something that has been stopped after a court case. The technology, however, still captures tracking and connecting data. The EESC is convinced that privacy can only be guaranteed through additional measures: restricting access to sensitive data to only a limited number of certified persons. Such security measures must be developed to the highest, most trustworthy standards, including regular verifications by independent EU bodies.</p>	<p>on Privacy and Electronic Communications,⁶⁶ modernising the current ePrivacy Directive, includes similar rules on the protection of terminal equipment. The proposal is currently in the legislative process involving the co-legislators.</p>
<p>4.5.1 The use of robotics in the healthcare sector is matter of concern. Robots are devices that are unable to replicate the empathic capacities and reciprocity of human care relationships. Care robots, therefore, should only be used for care tasks requiring no emotional, intimate or personal involvement. If not used under certain framework conditions, robots can undermine human dignity.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the Committee on how important emotional, intimate or personal involvement is in many tasks in healthcare. Respect for human dignity is at the root of the Union's values and fundamental rights, and the Commission's policies on technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics are firmly anchored in the principles of protecting our values and rights and human dignity.</p>
<p>4.7.2 Automation and robots will have a significant impact on the future of work. For example, the use of driverless transport systems (DTS) is already commonplace for transporting materials in warehouses. Robots can also replace</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that the digital transformation is both an engine of great opportunities and a source of possible challenges, including for the workforce. It is essential to base policy measures, at the EU, national or other levels, on sound</p>

⁶⁶ Proposal for a Regulation on Privacy and Electronic Communications COM/2017/010 final - 2017/03 (COD).

monotonous, heavy or dangerous work and a new generation of so-called "collaborative robots" can become physical partners for workers, particularly helpful for people with physical disabilities. Present-day robots mainly replace manual work, but robots using AI will also perform intellectual work. A significant number of professions will be affected, as robots take over certain tasks or even replace completely human workers, as we have witnessed in past decades. It is estimated that employment in all industrial sectors will remain stable until 2022. A look at large companies even shows that the shift in the division of labour between man and machine has created almost twice as many new jobs and functional roles as it has usurped. The EESC has discussed these issues a number of opinions⁶⁷.

4.7.3 Uneven access to new digital technologies and a skills gap can be a source of gradually growing differences in regional development with impact on economic, cultural and, consequently, social development of those regions. The EESC calls for assessing the scale of possible social inequalities and its possible effects on the EU's integrity.

4.7.4 Workers collaborating or interacting with automated systems, or working with a large amount of information, may face certain problems. They must deal with complex information-intensive tasks. Virtual reality, for example, is used for training and planning purposes, while augmented reality supports maintenance projects. The EESC recommends, whenever new automation systems are

statistical data and projections based on scientific methods, as the Committee recommends.

The Commission also agrees with the Committee that, in the absence of appropriate regulatory and non-regulatory measures, digitisation could increase differences among EU regions and citizens. This is why deepening and implementing the Digital Single Market, with appropriate accompanying measures to ensure social cohesion and the acquisition of basic and advanced digital skills by as many EU citizens as possible, is of the utmost importance. The Commission has launched several initiatives to increase the level of digital skills of EU citizens: for example the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, which was created to bring together a wide range of stakeholders – including Member States, companies, and education providers – who take action to tackle the lack of digital skills. The Commission has also launched a pilot project to specifically tackle skills mismatches and increase the number of young people with advanced digital skills through the Digital Opportunity Traineeships.

In addition, the Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework provides a coherent and comprehensive support for building the digital skills needed for the future. Funding will be available for both basic and advanced skills through a variety of programmes. The new Digital Europe programme will specifically focus on advanced digital skills and provide support to the development of advanced digital skills in

⁶⁷ [OJ C 434, 15.12.2017, p. 30](#); [OJ C 434, 15.12.2017, p. 36](#); [OJ C 237, 6.7.2018, p. 8](#), [OJ C 367, 10.10.2018, p. 15](#).

planned in industry and commerce, using objective scientific methods to optimise and evaluate human-machine interaction.

areas such as high performance computing, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and digital public services.

Furthermore, the Commission notes with interest the Committee's focus on 'cognitive ergonomics' and agrees that scientific research and technological innovation should devote attention to the way in which artificial intelligence systems, robots and more generally automation technologies can support human beings in the workplace, including by performing repetitive and/or dangerous tasks, while ensuring human dignity in the way in which data is collected and processed by such systems.

Given the importance and complexity of these matters, the Commission will most carefully consider the Committee's views, as well as the assessments and recommendations of other groups and bodies (such as the High-Level Expert Group on the Impact of the Digital Transformation on EU Labour Markets, which delivered its report with recommendations on 8 April 2019, and the report on "On how artificial intelligence, robotics and automation are transforming jobs and the economy in Europe" published by the European Political Strategy Centre on 10 May 2019) in defining its political and legislative priorities for the next years.

<p>N°9 The future of cohesion policy EESC 2019/255 – ECO/484 542nd Plenary Session - March 2019 Rapporteur: Stefano MALLIA (GR.I-MT) DG REGIO – Commissioner CREȚU</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.1. The EESC is of the firm view that the proposal to reduce the size of the cohesion policy budget for the period 2021-2027 is unacceptable.</p> <p>2.4. The EESC argues that the Commission/the EU institutions cannot expect to ask the people to support more Europe whilst at the same time the budget of such an important policy is reduced. Nevertheless, the EESC is of the opinion that these investments do not substitute for the efforts of the Member States but complement them at both national and regional level.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee's position regarding the budget for cohesion policy. However, in the Commission's opinion, the proposed allocation is fair and balanced and this policy will remain the most important investment instrument of the European Union, addressed to all its regions.</p> <p>The withdrawal of the United Kingdom would leave a sizable gap, while the European Union budget has to respond appropriately to the new challenges and Union priorities. Still, the proposed allocation for cohesion policy is realistic and substantial.</p> <p>As proposed by the Commission, the focus of support on the poorest regions and Member States would be further enhanced. 76% of the funding would go to these regions while this percentage was slightly lower in 2014-2020 (75%). This is in line with the core mandate of cohesion policy.</p> <p>The Commission agrees with the statement that cohesion policy investments should only complement the efforts of Member States at the national and regional level. Therefore, firstly, the Commission proposed an increase of national co-financing levels. Secondly, cohesion policy investments would concentrate mostly on the areas with the highest European added value, in line with the</p>

	proposed thematic concentration requirements.
<p>1.2. The EESC believes that there is a need for a new ambitious and clear European strategy that is aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals and has a strong coordination mechanism that can guarantee the firm continuity between the different political cycles.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the EESC's call for a clear political strategy by renewing Europe 2020 strategy and notes that the proposals for the next Multiannual Financial Framework adopted in May/June 2018 are built around the political priorities set out in the Rome Declaration of March 2017. The proposed Common Provisions Regulation⁶⁸ is fully aligned with the current European Union political agenda and commitments, as reflected by the proposed five policy objectives under its proposed Article 4(1). The alignment is further enhanced by the closer link built with the European Semester, which provides for greater coherence between the European Union economic governance priorities and the use of European Union funds.</p> <p>As regards Sustainable Development Goals, in 2014-2020, 94% of the planned investments have been allocated to eleven Sustainable Development Goals highly relevant for social, economic and environmental development and that alignment will be continued over 2020.</p>
<p>1.4 The EESC is of the opinion that all regions must be eligible for funding. On the other hand, the EESC must express in no uncertain manner its disappointment at the weakening of the cross border dynamic within cohesion policy.</p>	<p>The proposed Common Provisions Regulation ensures that no European Union region will be left behind in the 2021-2027 period. Cohesion policy will provide appropriate support to all Member States and regions in order to address the twin challenge of industrial and energy transition.</p> <p>The Commission proposal on Interreg⁶⁹ reinforces the cooperation aspect of cohesion policy and cross-border</p>

⁶⁸ COM (2018) 375 final.

⁶⁹ COM (2018) 374 final.

	<p>cooperation represents an important pillar of the Cohesion policy package. The Interreg regulation as proposed by the Commission would become more stand-alone and simplified. The Commission proposed to integrate the external dimension and strengthen the strategic approach in programming, based on functional areas. A new structure of components was proposed that should better reflect different development challenges and means of cooperation.</p>
<p>1.5. The EESC underlines that there is a need for a territorially more tailored approach, that would support and specifically address the most isolated and sparsely populated areas (very low population density, islands, mountains etc.) as well as the "popular" and yet challenged functional urban areas in their development.</p> <p>The EESC calls for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the links that connect those regions with mainland Europe and their citizens' sense of belonging to the European project. • Giving them access to appropriate financial resources, also through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ the changes to "Berlin method"; ✓ thematic concentration requirements; ✓ and co-financing rates. <p>In general, the EESC urges the Council and the Parliament to continue revising the system for allocating funds under</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee's recommendation for areas with structural and permanent disadvantages, as referred to in Article 174 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union.</p> <p>It considers that the flexibility offered to Member States and regions on programming, in particular through a simpler programming menu, as detailed under Article 2(1) of the proposed European Regional Development Fund / Cohesion Fund Regulation⁷⁰, would enable programming authorities to address their specific territorial challenges in an effective way.</p> <p>The Commission takes note of the Committee's view on thematic concentration. However, the proposed concentration on policy objectives 1 and 2 aims at ensuring stronger focus of Funds' support on European Union priorities and commitments, while taking into account specific needs. For this reason, the thematic concentration requirements take into account the level of development of Member States (as expressed by Gross National Income levels compared to the</p>

⁷⁰ COM (2018) 372 final.

<p>cohesion policy, specifically taking into account other criteria (beyond GDP), such as inequality, migration, unemployment and youth unemployment, competitiveness, climate change, working conditions and demography.</p> <p>Additionally, the EESC calls on social factors (such as inequality levels, poverty, migration, education levels, etc.) to be considered when estimating the co-financing rates and thematic concentration requirements of the most developed and transition regions.</p>	<p>European Union average) and apply at national level. These mechanisms are expected to provide Member States and regions with sufficient flexibility to address specific thematic and territorial challenges of different regions and territories.</p> <p>The Commission also stresses that co-financing rates apply at priority axis level. The concerned regions therefore have all necessary flexibility to modulate the intensity of support at project level.</p>
<p>1.6. The EESC welcomes the stronger link with the European Semester and also calls for integration with the country-specific recommendations as a means of encouraging structural reforms.</p> <p>In addition, the EESC agrees that it is also important to ensure full complementarity and coordination with the new, enhanced Reform Support Programme.</p>	<p>Cohesion policy has been contributing systematically to addressing country-specific socio-economic challenges, through both targeted investments and ex-ante conditionalities. In that sense, the policy has been instrumental in bringing much needed structural change in European societies. More than two thirds of all country specific recommendations are directly relevant for investments and interventions funded by cohesion policy in the 2014-2020 period.</p> <p>The Commission underlines that the proposed Common Provisions Regulation⁷¹ includes further reinforcement of the link between the European Union budget – in particular cohesion policy – and the European Semester. Cohesion policy programming and implementation would thus reflect even better the outcome of the European Semester process, in particular by addressing investment related country specific recommendations.</p>
<p>1.7. The EESC believes that the</p>	<p>The Commission has put forward a</p>

⁷¹ COM (2018) 375 final.

<p>regulatory package should be much simpler and avoid micromanaging the funds. There should be a differentiation in terms of bureaucratic procedures for operational programmes that are considered to be of a relatively small size vis-à-vis much larger programmes. The EESC would also encourage the Commission to explore further possibilities that could facilitate the participation of smaller actors.</p>	<p>significantly simplified and shorter framework for cohesion policy with more than 80 simplification measures.</p> <p>The aim was to prepare a policy framework that provides incentives for modernising investments, making implementation more flexible and simpler.</p> <p>The Commission takes note of the Committee position to further differentiate in relation to the size of the programme. However, the Commission notes that it proposed a system where the management and control system can be lighter for those who have good track records of effectively functioning systems. The Commission believes that this provision will further strengthen sound financial management and reduce administrative burden.</p>
<p>1.9. The EESC calls on the Commission to continue reviewing the current publicity obligations and to upgrade them significantly taking into consideration the modern means of digital communication channels.</p>	<p>Improving communication on European Union funds has been one of the key pillars of the Commission's work over the last five years. Challenges in this area were and still are particularly high: according to the Eurobarometer, only 1 in 3 Europeans are aware of what cohesion policy has delivered for them.</p> <p>The proposed Common Provisions Regulation for 2021-2027 brings indeed a great deal of simplification, which covers all strands of activities, including communication, especially when it comes to simplifying and clarifying communication responsibilities - be it for managing authorities or for beneficiaries.</p> <p>The proposed Common Provisions Regulation provides notably for a harmonised, simpler set of communication rules (including a single European Union branding, a list of operations selected for support by the Funds and a single funding portal giving reliable information to</p>

	millions of potential beneficiaries and the general public).
<p>1.10. The EESC calls for ensuring that there is a strong and meaningful participation by civil society at all stages of the design and implementation of cohesion policy.</p> <p>1.11. The EESC points out that at EU level there is no structured involvement of civil society organisations in the process of monitoring the implementation of cohesion policy. It therefore strongly recommends that the Commission establish a European civil society cohesion forum with the participation of the social partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders in order to consult the social partners and CSOs annually on the state of implementation of cohesion policy throughout the different programming cycles.</p> <p>6.2. Concerning the Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP), the EESC asks that it be revised and updated in direct consultation with the civil society organisations and other stakeholders. The EESC also asks that the Code of Conduct be made binding.</p>	<p>The partnership principle has already been strengthened during 2014-2020 period.</p> <p>The Commission is regularly meeting the umbrella organisations at EU level within the 'Structured Dialogue with European Structural and Investment Funds' partners group of experts'. The mission of the Structured Dialogue group of experts is to establish an open, frank and informal dialogue with partners working in the field of the European Structural and Investment Funds. So far, 10 meetings were organised; all the documents – agendas, presentations and minutes from the meetings are publically available⁷².</p> <p>The Commission takes note of the dissatisfaction of the European Social Partners on the Code of Conduct⁷³. However, the legal solution proposed ensures continuity as regards the content of the legal act and hence certainty for the partners.</p>

⁷² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/communication/structured-dialogue-with-partners/

⁷³ Commission Delegated Regulation 240/2014

<p>N°10 Employment opportunities for economically inactive people (own-initiative opinion) EESC-2018-01711 – SOC/575 542nd Plenary session – March 2019 Rapporteur: José Custodio LEIRIAO (Gr. III - PT) DG EMPL – Commissioner THYSSEN</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.1 The EESC [...] urges the Commission and the Member States to place a strategy for dealing with the significant number of economically inactive people at the forefront of their political priorities.</p>	<p>The Commission believes that important measures have already been taken with the Council Recommendations on establishing the Youth Guarantee and on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market, which cover a large part of economically inactive people.</p> <p>The Employment Guidelines reflect the European Union’s approach for promoting employment in its territory and cover priorities for economically inactive people. The European Pillar of Social Rights (‘the Pillar’) provides a compass for upwards social convergence in Europe and includes a whole range of principles that are relevant for inactive people, notably in the field of equal opportunities and social protection and inclusion, such as access to education, training and life-long learning, minimum income, the inclusion of people with disabilities, housing and assistance to the homeless or access to essential services.</p>
<p>1.2 [...] The EESC believes that the Commission and the Member States must also focus their efforts on reactivation policies and policies to create job opportunities for all, in particular those who are most excluded from the labour market and who want and are able to work.</p>	<p>With the 2016 Council Recommendation on the integration of long-term unemployed into the labour market, the EU has taken decisive steps to reinforce the way vulnerable groups and people on the margins of the labour market are supported. The Commission is regularly monitoring the implementation of this Recommendation through a special data</p>

	<p>collection and with the view to share best practices. The 2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways aims to ensure that adults with a low level of skills, including the economically inactive, acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills to enhance employability.</p>
<p>1.3 Given that the general recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market was issued in 2008⁷⁴, and in order to avoid a piecemeal approach, the EESC recommends that the Commission assess the progress made and, if needed, adopt a new, comprehensive strategy, accompanied by action plans and objectives assigned to the Member States for each sub-group of economically inactive people. This strategy should include increased social innovation and more specific details on policies for achieving results, and display greater ambition when it comes to integrating into the labour market those members of this population who want to work.</p> <p>3.2 The EESC recommends that the Commission publish a new, comprehensive strategy, accompanied by action plans and objectives assigned to the Member States for each sub-group of economically inactive people.</p>	<p>In 2017, the Commission took stock of the implementation of the 2008 Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from labour market⁷⁵. Among others, it concluded that this Recommendation has acted as a driver for structural reforms in many EU Member States.</p> <p>The European Pillar of Social Rights (‘the Pillar’) provides a compass for upwards social convergence in Europe and includes a whole range of principles that are relevant for inactive people, mentioned above.</p> <p>Active inclusion policies are monitored through the European Semester. The Pillar is now solidly embedded into the European Semester process. It is accompanied by a Social Scoreboard and related headline indicators that allow monitoring performance across the Member States.</p> <p>The country-specific recommendations issued to the Member States have been systematically addressing challenges around active inclusion, notably the adequacy and coverage of minimum income schemes and unemployment benefits, improving access to social services (particularly childcare and healthcare) and improving coordination</p>

⁷⁴ Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of the people excluded from the labour market (2008/867/EC) ([OJ L 307, 18.11.2008, p. 11](#)).

⁷⁵ SWD(2017) 257.

	<p>between employment and welfare policies to help vulnerable or inactive people.</p> <p>EU funds provide support to social innovation, including through the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation. Two calls were specifically dedicated to support in the area of integrated social services in 2014 and 2015.</p>
<p>1.4 The EESC recommends that the European Commission encourage Member States to make their active labour market policies more effective and to ensure that their public employment services are able to provide more targeted assistance for people willing to be included in the labour market, by taking into account their abilities and ambitions</p>	<p>The Commission is putting increasing emphasis on the importance of providing integrated services when designing and implementing active labour market policies. In this context, targeted and tailor-made assistance is decisive in ensuring that people receive the necessary support and services reflecting their abilities and ambitions.</p> <p>In the European network of Public Employment Services, Member States are regularly exchanging best practices, notably through the so-called bench learning exercise to improve the effectiveness of active labour market policies.</p> <p>The European Social Fund is currently one of the main instruments used for supporting the above initiatives and will continue to provide the appropriate support in the context of the European Social Fund + during the programming period 2021-2027. Specific objectives (i) and (ii) of the proposal for a regulation on the European Social Fund +⁷⁶ specifically call for improving access to employment of all jobseekers - in particularly youth, long-term unemployed and the inactive - and for labour market institutions to ensure tailor-made assistance.</p>

⁷⁶ COM(2018)382.

1.10 Given that the economically inactive population includes many people with the potential for normal integration into the labour market, the EESC urges the Commission and the Member States to **create specific and favourable incentives for companies to employ such economically inactive people**. This could be achieved through the introduction of legislative and non-legislative measures ensuring that the European Social Fund covers the full costs of training these people, thus making it possible for companies to employ them.

At the same time, it is also crucial for the European Union to encourage Member States to **promote attractive working conditions, decent wages** and social security systems to motivate the inactive population to participate in the labour market and in the creation of wealth and economic, social and environmental well-being

Most of the eligibility rules applicable to programmes supported by the European Social Fund are fixed at national and/or regional level and there are no impediments at Union level to fully cover the training costs for inactive people improving their skills and gaining a qualification. In addition, recruitment subsidies for companies hiring these inactive people can also be supported by the European Social Fund provided that they are compliant with State aid rules⁷⁷. Based on the Commission proposal for the European Social Fund + for the programming period post-2020, all these possibilities remain available.

The European Social Fund has therefore provided - and the European Social Fund + will be able to continue to provide - training to disadvantaged groups and individuals, including economically inactive people, such as persons with disabilities, persons who are not in education, employment, or training ('NEETs') or those seeking asylum and refugees, while promoting equality between men and women and non-discrimination as a horizontal principle.

With the Pillar, the EU has taken decisive actions to encourage Member States to strengthen the social dimension of economic policies. The Pillar sets out key principles for promoting adequate working conditions including wage levels and supportive social security systems.

As part of the implementation of the Pillar, the Commission has proposed a Council Recommendation on access to social

⁷⁷ See in particular Article 32 of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, OJ L 187, 26.06.2014, p. 1.

	<p>protection for workers and the self-employed⁷⁸. The objective is to support people in non-standard forms of employment and self-employment who, due to their employment status, are not sufficiently covered by social security schemes and thus are exposed to higher economic uncertainty and potential inactivity. The Recommendation was politically agreed by the Council in December 2018 by unanimity and is awaiting final adoption.</p>
<p>1.12 The EESC calls on the Commission and Member States to ensure that Industry 4.0 policies and the development of new technologies respect the changes in the world of work, bringing benefits for both workers and companies.</p>	<p>The Commission has been analysing the implications of ICT and digitalisation on employment in its latest annual Reviews of Employment and Social Developments in Europe. It has also established an independent High-Level Group to report on the impact of the digital transformation on EU labour markets⁷⁹; while operationalising the Pillar stands to secure a balanced and just future world of work. The Commission has also advanced a coordinated plan on artificial intelligence with a human-centric approach at its core.</p>
<p>3.3.3 It is also necessary to clarify the situation of inactive people once they exercise their right to mobility. [...] The EESC calls on the Commission to give urgent thought to this lack of social support and to produce legislation to remedy this omission.</p>	<p>In December 2016 the Commission launched a proposal to revise Regulation (EC) 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems, and its implementing Regulation (EC) 987/2009. Among other things, the proposal updates the coordination rules in relation to access by economically inactive mobile citizens to social benefits. Based on various case law of the Court of Justice of the EU in this area, the proposal clarifies the conditions under which an economically inactive mobile citizen has a right to claim certain social benefits in the host Member State, and</p>

⁷⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=19158&langId=en>

⁷⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1226&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9344>

	<p>under which conditions Member States may decide not to grant those benefits.</p> <p>The legislative process on this file is ongoing in both the European Parliament and the Council, and discussions will be resumed later in 2019 in the new mandate of the European Parliament.</p>
<p>4.8 Understanding the barriers to employment [...] is also essential for identifying the groups that can make use of the employment programmes and the benefits relating to them, and that are not currently considered as "clients" with regard to the jobs and benefits offered by these institutions. The EESC therefore urges the Commission (in cooperation with the OECD or independently) to put together statistical models which cater for the specific nature of the economically inactive population, so that they can be successfully included in active employment policies.</p>	<p>The Commission uses a Labour Market Model to simulate the medium- and long-term impact of labour market policies in very different institutional environments, and with a particular focus on workers' qualifications.</p>

<p>N°11 Supportive education systems to avoid skills mismatches – what transition is needed (own-initiative opinion) EESC-2018-02195 – SOC/576 542nd Plenary session – March 2019 Rapporteur: Milena ANGELOVA (GR. I-BG) DG EMPL – Commissioner THYSSEN</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.4 The EESC asks the EC to intensify the spread of best practices on qualification programmes and VET. The right mix of incentives for all participants in the education and training process should also be provided as to safeguard the right to appropriate training for allⁱ. In line with its previous opinion, the EESC stresses the importance of a European Education Areaⁱⁱ. The EESC sees a need for further upgrading and a need to constantly improve the skills and competences of teachers and trainers at all levels of education and training.</p> <p>3.4.11 The European Commission should encourage MS to explore the positive experience in EU countries with well-developed VET systems and consider the possibility of developing programmes to facilitate such an exchange.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the importance of spreading good practices on qualification programmes and both initial and continuing vocational education. Apprenticeships are an important part of vocational education and training. In November 2018, the Commission launched the Apprenticeship Support Service to help Member States improve their systems and spread good practices. Further, the Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships⁸⁰ sets out a common European understanding on the criteria to be used to maintain and develop national apprenticeship schemes. The Commission agrees on the need to set the right incentives, but also the framework conditions, for the key stakeholders involved in delivering vocational education and training, such as learners, providers and companies. The Framework recommends supporting companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises, through financial and/or non-financial means.</p> <p>As regards incentivising learning throughout life, the Working Group on Adult Learning (2016–2018) in the context of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training for 2020 has published recommendations for</p>

⁸⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018H0502%2801%29>

policies that promote the workplace becoming a place of learning.

In addition, the Commission reaffirms the right to lifelong training for all as set out in Principle 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Regarding the European Education Area, in 2019 the Commission has launched a new initiative under the Erasmus+ programme, namely to create Centres of Vocational Excellence. It aims to connect vocational education and training centres at local level with local industry and research and development organisations thus contributing to regional smart specialisation strategies and strengthening skills provision. It will also lead to creating transnational platforms of vocational excellence in Europe.

Moreover, under the 2018 Council recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad⁸¹, the Commission will support the exchange of good practices in recognising qualifications, both in general and vocational education.

Under the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework, the Riga objectives for vocational education and training 2015-2020⁸² highlight the importance of introducing systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development for teachers and trainers (objective no. 5). The Working Group within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020) on vocational education and training: Teachers and Trainers in work-

⁸¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1557820643961&uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1557820643961&uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01))

⁸² https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/eu-policy-in-the-field-of-vocational-education-and-training-vet_en

	<p>based learning (2016-2018) produced 12 policy pointers⁸³ to support the professional development of teachers and trainers.</p> <p>The Commission also provides funding through the Erasmus+ programme under the Strategic Partnerships actions to foster exchange of best practices and educational innovation on common challenges and important areas in the field of vocational education and training. Furthermore funding is dedicated to the professional development of vocational education staff and trainers through transnational mobility. This aims to enhance their skills and competences, making them more responsive to current situations and to strengthen their collaborative networks. Through the Erasmus+ programme, funding is also provided for further spreading well-developed vocational education and training approaches to other countries. For example, the Apprenticeship Toolbox was produced by vocational education and training authorities in five countries with developed apprenticeship and dual vocational education and training systems (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland).⁸⁴</p>
<p>2.10 The EU should encourage and help Member States to urgently address this structural labour market challenge and to tackle skills mismatches which create bottlenecks to growth, with particular focus on STEM and digital skills. [...]</p>	<p>Nearly all jobs now require some level of digital skills, which are also crucial for participation in daily life. This is why, the Commission attaches great importance to the development of digital skills and skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in order to tackle skills mismatches and overcome bottlenecks. The Skills Agenda for Europe is addressing digital skills by giving priority to them at all levels, from basic to high-end, for instance</p>

⁸³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=fr&pubId=8131&furtherPubs=yes>

⁸⁴ <https://www.apprenticeship-toolbox.eu/>

though the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition⁸⁵ and Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways⁸⁶.

The Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, the Communication on School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life⁸⁷ and the Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education address the need to support the development of, and the interest in, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics competences and making these careers more attractive. The Commission announced in the Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education the launch of an up-scaled EU STEM Coalition to promote the modernisation and uptake of relevant STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) through more multi-disciplinary programmes. The Commission champions STEM approach in terms of teaching and learning, as well as curricula that integrate STEM and non-STEM subjects. The new European Universities - launched under the European Education Area - will lead the way in making transdisciplinary and challenge-based approach central to their innovative learning and teaching, including high-level digital competencies, critical thinking, problem-solving, management and entrepreneurial skills.

The third pillar of the Skills Agenda addresses actions to improve skills intelligence, which is also an important element in understanding and tackling skills

⁸⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-skills-jobs-coalition>

⁸⁶ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2016_484_R_0001

⁸⁷ COM/2017/0248 final

mismatches.

In January 2018, the Commission adopted the Digital Education Action Plan⁸⁸, outlining how the Commission will support Member States to ensure that education systems make good use of digital technologies and are prepared for the future. One of the three priorities of the Action Plan focuses on developing digital skills and competences among young Europeans. The five actions under this priority work towards supporting the development of coding, cybersecurity and open science skills, together with digital and entrepreneurial skills among young female students (12-18 years). The Working Group on Digital Education: Learning, Teaching and Assessment in the context of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020) discusses the use of digital technologies in education and training and the development of digital competences, and provides a platform for exchange among Member States. The development of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and digital competences are also a focus of many projects supported by the Erasmus+ programme, particularly in the context of strategic partnerships between educational institutions, from exchanges of best practice to the development of new curricula for the teaching of such subjects.

The “digital traineeships” implemented through Erasmus+ aim to enhance 'deep-tech' skills such as cybersecurity, big data, quantum computing, artificial intelligence, and web and graphic design, digital marketing, software development, and coding.

Furthermore, the Commission Joint

⁸⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan>

	<p>Research Centre delivered detailed frameworks for the development of the digital and entrepreneurial key competences for life-long learning.</p>
<p>3.1.1 If the EU wants to give its citizens the best chance of success and to preserve and improve its competitiveness, it needs to encourage Member States to foster a policy environment that offers career- focused initial education and training and which continues to provide opportunities for life-long learning throughout people's working lives.</p> <p>3.2.1 To be able to equip students with the fundamental skills for the future – e.g. curiosity, searching for reliable information, an ability for continuous learning, creativity, problem-solving, team work – secondary education has to shift from requiring only memorisation and repetition to a project-based and problem-solving approach.</p>	<p>Developing key competences for all is at the heart of the European Education Area.</p> <p>The Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning⁸⁹ sets out eight key competences needed by all for personal fulfilment and development, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion: literacy; multilingualism, competence in maths, science, technology and engineering, digital, personal, social and learning to learn, citizenship, entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression.</p> <p>The Recommendation serves to help Member States implement innovative approaches to education and training and develop key competences for all. It encourages competence-based teaching and learning. It also presents good practice examples in education and training that support competence development. These include: using a variety of learning approaches and environments, such as based on projects, inquiry or work; supporting teachers in delivering competence-oriented teaching and learning; collaboration with stakeholders and cross-discipline learning, and assessment and validation of key competences.</p> <p>The Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education called for more cooperation between higher education institutions and employers to increase the relevance of their curricula and deliver them effectively, and increase opportunities for students to access high quality work-based learning. This policy objective is supported by Erasmus+ cooperation projects and mobility.</p>

⁸⁹ 2018/C 189/01.

<p>N°12 Education about the European Union (Exploratory opinion requested by the Romanian Presidency) EESC 2018/6187- SOC/612 542nd Plenary Session – March 2019 Rapporteur: Tatjana BABRAUSKIENE (GR.II-LT) DG EAC – Commissioner NAVRACSICS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.1. The EESC believes that it is important to strengthen citizens' knowledge and understanding of EU history and culture, fundamental values and rights, core principles and decisions, and the decision-making processes at EU level.</p> <p>1.2. underlines that holistic education, training and lifelong learning (LLL) have an essential role to play in strengthening EU identity, a sense of community and belonging, and responsibility of EU citizens, encouraging their active participation in decision-making about the EU. The goals of EU integration, its advantages and drawbacks must be addressed boldly and confidently at the MS and EU level alike.</p> <p>1.3. emphasises that learning happens everywhere and constantly, actively and passively. Therefore, education about the EU is not only a task for formal education and does not only concern young people. Both 'life-wide' and 'lifelong' education should be supported and a special focus should be put on older generations, with means of providing information adapted to their ways of learning.</p>	<p>The Commission shares these views.</p> <p>In its Communication of 30 April 2019 'Europe in May 2019 – Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world'⁹⁰, the Commission stressed the importance of communication and issued recommendations on how European Union institutions and Member States should better communicate about the EU. Such communicating activities should be conducted jointly, with messages targeted to the public at large, for a better understanding of how the EU works and what it does, starting from shared values. This includes promoting teaching and learning about the EU in order to increase citizens' knowledge of the EU, its values, functioning and policies.</p> <p>Good practices of teaching and learning about the EU already exist across the EU, both as public policies pursued by Member States and as grassroots activities offered by nongovernment organizations (NGOs), foundations or universities. While some Member States have integrated learning about the EU into their curricula and</p>

⁹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/euco_sibiu_communication_en.pdf

	<p>teacher education programmes, great differences exist between and within Member States.</p> <p>The European Education Area also seeks ‘to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for active citizenship as well as means to experience European identity in all its diversity’. In this context, the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching⁹¹ indicates that Member States should promote a European dimension of teaching, focusing more on European history and heritage. This includes non-formal learning.</p>
<p>1.5. suggests putting more emphasis on education about the EU and EU identity in all its diversity as part of basic skills and key competences, in particular EU-literacy, and thus defining a set of common learning outcomes in this area (minimum knowledge, skills and attitudes towards the EU).</p> <p>1.6. It is essential that MS properly implement the Council Recommendation on promoting common values and the 2015 Paris Declaration.</p>	<p>The European Pillar of Social Rights states that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that allow full participation in society.</p> <p>The 2018 Council Recommendation on ‘Key competences for lifelong learning’⁹² recommends that Member States foster the development of citizenship competences. This encompasses an understanding of the European common values, critical understanding of the main developments in national, European and world history, as well as knowledge of European integration. It also involves learning to participate in decision-making processes at all levels.</p> <p>The 2018 Council Recommendation Promoting Common Values, Inclusive Education and the European Dimension of Teaching invites Member States to step up their efforts to promote common values</p>

⁹¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1528379535771&uri=CELEX:32018H0607\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1528379535771&uri=CELEX:32018H0607(01))

⁹² Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (Text with EEA relevance.) ST/9009/2018/INIT; OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1–13.

	<p>such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. The Recommendation puts teaching and learning about the EU firmly on the policy agenda and provides for a platform of dialogue and cooperation between the Commission and the Member States. It identifies twenty actions to be carried out by Member States across education, culture, youth and sport, with the support of the Commission and the Erasmus+ programme. Also within the context of the 2015 Paris Declaration, the Working Group of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020) on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education also supports the implementation of the Recommendation in the Member States. Also, an Eastern Partnership Conference on promoting common values through education took place in Tbilisi on 25-26 June 2019.</p>
<p>1.7. recommends that the future increased Erasmus+ budget (2021 – 2027) should foster a sense of EU belonging by ensuring learning mobility for all, especially people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and calls for all future projects to put emphasis on learning about the EU, building an EU identity and supporting intergenerational learning about the EU, as well as on language learning for all age groups, and civil dialogue for adults</p> <p>1.8. welcomes the 30th year of Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Activities to promote excellence in teaching and research in the field of EU studies worldwide, and calls for the programme's budget to be increased and extended to all education</p>	<p>With the proposed doubling of the budget of the next Erasmus programme (2021-2027), the new programme could enable up to 12 million people to participate in learning mobility, i.e. three times more than under the current Erasmus+ programme.</p> <p>A new action to empower young people to participate more actively in society is set out in the programme. It will support projects bringing together young people and decision makers from across Europe in order to foster European awareness and active citizenship.</p> <p>In 2011-2013, the Commission implemented the 'Learning Europe at School' initiative, at the request of the European Parliament. Bottom-up work on</p>

<p>sectors in order to enhance education about the EU and strengthen democratic citizenship.</p>	<p>this topic continues to date through projects funded under the Jean Monnet activities of the Erasmus+ programme.</p> <p>The proposal for the future Erasmus programme, the Commission includes the continuation of Jean Monnet activities promoting knowledge and awareness about the EU. It plans to extend it to other sectors of education beyond higher education, most notably to secondary education and Vocational Education and Training institutes.</p>
<p>1.6. calls for strategic policy measures at national and EU level to promote learning about the EU aimed to strengthen a sense of identity and belonging to the EU and to demonstrate the tangible benefits of EU membership for citizens.</p> <p>1.9. calls for better information sharing about the EU with EU citizens, supported by EU and MS information, communication and education (ICE) strategies.</p> <p>1.10. and 6.3. suggests that European and national public service media, including the Euronews channel, should have a strategic role in informing citizens about EU achievements. EU Information Offices based in the MS, as well as EP members and other representatives, EESC members and other policy makers active in the European field should also play an active role in supporting EU identity-building processes at national level.</p>	<p>Since 2017, the ‘Altiero Spinelli Prize for Outreach’ rewards outstanding work that enhances the citizens' awareness of the EU and promotes their engagement in the democratic processes that shape its future.</p> <p>The Europe for Citizens programme⁹³ contributes to citizens' understanding and awareness of the Union, its institutions and their work, its history, its values, its aims and its diversity. It also fosters European citizenship and encourages the participation of citizens in the democratic processes.</p> <p>Three communication campaigns, ‘EU that delivers’, ‘EU that empowers’ and ‘EU that protects’, were launched by the EU in 2017. They aim at improving citizens' understanding of the EU and its actions for Europeans.</p> <p>The Commission is addressing the need for more information on the Union through the Multimedia Actions budgetary line. It aims to strengthen news reporting on EU affairs from European points of view, i.e. beyond national perspectives. Actions include the funding of radio and data-driven networks as well as support to the production of EU</p>

⁹³ Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014 of 14 April 2014 establishing the ‘Europe for Citizens’ programme for the period 2014-2020; [OJ L 115, 17.4.2014, p. 3–13](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOL_2014_115_R_0002)http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOL_2014_115_R_0002

	<p>programmes in the television channel Euronews, which is considered the sole multilingual broadcaster producing news content under a European perspective. Media funded under this heading retain full editorial independence.</p> <p>In the case of Euronews, the Commission has been actively strengthening its EU dimension. Over the last years, the support given to the production of EU-related television programmes has been increased to reach 50% of the total support to the channel. Euronews' Brussels office has been reinforced and a network of correspondents in the main cities of Europe has been put in place (including Eastern Europe, where the presence of Euronews is weaker).</p> <p>Commission Representations in Member States and Europe Direct networks (Europe Direct Information Centres, European Documentation Centres, Team Europe speakers) play an active role at local, regional and national level in strengthening the European identity. Transnational dialogues with citizens have proven how important it is to hand out guided educational readings before debating with citizens in order to hold an informed debate.</p> <p>The Europe Direct networks also play an important role in the identity-building process for pupils and students in particular by conducting informed debates in local schools or universities, using tailor-made material and tools. EU representatives on the ground, are an important source for Europe Direct networks to cooperate with.</p>
<p>1.9. points out the need for having a Commissioner responsible for Communication.</p>	<p>According to Article 3 of the Commission's Rules of Procedure, the allocation of portfolios to the Members of</p>

	<p>the Commission is the prerogative of the Commission's President. During current mandate, communication is under direct responsibility of the Commission's President.</p>
<p>1.11. recommends setting up an EU level policy strategy, while respecting national competence in the area of education, in order to propose recommendations on cooperation (for instance via the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) or through a high level group) among MS to encourage initiatives in education systems and action at the national and local level on education about the EU as well as EU identity-building, in close cooperation with social partners and all relevant stakeholders. This should be supported by up-to-date studies mapping the situation concerning teaching about the EU.</p> <p>1.12. recommends incorporating education about the EU and EU identity-building in the EU2030 Strategy and the ET2030 Strategic Framework, and in the European Semester process (among the relevant country-specific recommendations), provided that accurate systematic data are available.</p>	<p>The Commission study 'Learning Europe at School'⁹⁴ provided an overview of the situation in the Member States. The Commission may conduct follow-up studies to prepare for new activities under Jean Monnet. The current Jean Monnet actions under Erasmus+ programme aim at fostering the dialogue between the academic world and society, including local and national policy-makers, civil servants, civil society, as well as representatives of education and the media.</p> <p>Work is currently underway in shaping the post-ET2020 (strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training), based, inter alia, on findings from the Forum on the Future of Learning, which took place in early 2019 and brought together around 400 stakeholders in education, training and youth from across Europe to discuss the future of education and training in relation to six main challenges, which included citizenship.</p> <p>The European Semester looks into general aspects of quality and equity in education. Given the focus of the European Semester on jobs and growth it would be difficult for topics like education about the EU and EU identity to be integrated into the current process.</p>
<p>1.13. and 4.4. calls for the provision and promotion of a centralised accessible</p>	<p>The recently enhanced Learning Corner⁹⁶ of the Commission puts together a broad</p>

⁹⁴ *Learning Europe at School*, ICF report commissioned by DG EAC, 2012.

⁹⁶ https://europa.eu/learning-corner/home_en

<p>platform with learning and teaching materials, linking various current initiatives and portals, available in different EU languages for education institutions and individual learners about the EU, EU identity-building, with a specific focus on the fundamental values of the EU, democracy, participation in democratic decision-making, tolerance, and common understanding.</p> <p>4.4. Teaching and training materials⁹⁵, resulting from various EU funded projects, should be available for all, better promoted and used in schools and in other activities aimed at learning about the EU.</p>	<p>variety of learning materials, teaching resources, games, quizzes, videos, etc. about the EU that EU institutions developed, with the help of teachers. These materials are available in all EU official languages and easily accessible on one single platform. Promotion of this new centralised platform has started.</p> <p>The Commission’s Erasmus+ Projects Results Platform⁹⁷ provides information on the project results that are relevant to the teaching and learning about Europe at school (several of them funded under the Jean Monnet Activities). This includes information on concrete teaching and learning materials produced.</p> <p>The Commission’s ‘School Education Gateway’ online platform includes a section on developing the citizenship competence, with articles and project examples⁹⁸. In 2019, the eTwinning online platform, which brings together around 500,000 teachers and 190,000 schools, focused on democratic participation, in addition to its permanent priorities of citizenship, values and digital learning. This topic will be explored in an annual eTwinning book and during the annual conference on 25-27 October 2019 where projects and professional development opportunities will be featured.</p>
<p>1.17. proposes to establish a European Prize/Label for teaching about the EU and building an EU identity, both for schools and individuals.</p>	<p>The Commission is currently preparing a new prize to reward outstanding secondary school teachers and secondary schools that help their pupils learn about the EU in ways that inspire. It will provide EU-wide recognition and visibility and highlight the importance of teaching and learning about the EU at a young age. It will showcase</p>

⁹⁵ Such as: <https://euhrou.cz/>.

⁹⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/>

⁹⁸ https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/theme_pages/citizenship.htm

	<p>inspirational teaching methods that engage pupils actively and will help spread these practices. The first Call for Applications will be issued in September 2019.</p>
<p>4.3. underlines the importance of having regulations or recommendations on the development of teachers' citizenship education competences through initial teacher education available in all Member States, including teachers' and school heads' continuous professional development.⁹⁹</p>	<p>The Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning encourages Member States to provide adequate support to educational staff through both initial teacher education and continuous professional development with a view to developing all key competences, including citizenship.</p> <p>Staff exchanges, peer learning, collaboration, flexibility and autonomy can help educational staff in their work. Member States are also encouraged to enable access to centres of expertise and research.</p>
<p>6.5. Current Erasmus+ students should be encouraged to use their experience from abroad to deliver information to younger people about Europe, about intercultural learning and about how it is to experience a different culture.</p>	<p>Erasmus+ alumni are encouraged to share their experience with their friends, fellow students, staff in their institutions, journalists, etc. Erasmus+ programme is funding alumni associations offering a platform for networking and setting up trainings for Erasmus+ trainers; the latter act as multipliers, delivering trainings and workshops for the public at large.</p> <p>With the future Erasmus programme it is planned to mobilise even further the potential of former Erasmus participants and to support activities of alumni networks, ambassadors and 'Europeers', by encouraging them to act as multipliers and advocate European values.</p>

⁹⁹[Joint Statement on Citizenship Education & EU Common Values.](#)

<p>N°13 Resilient democracy through a strong and diverse civil society (own-initiative opinion) EESC 2018/4661 - SOC/605 542nd Plenary Session - March 2019 Rapporteur: Christian MOOS (GR.III-DE) DG JUST – Commissioner JOUROVÁ</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>6.3 The EESC reiterates its call, made in conjunction with the European Parliament, for a Democracy Semester and a European control mechanism on the rule of law and fundamental rights¹⁰⁰. The EESC proposes the establishment of a Democracy Scoreboard that would, inter alia, reflect the framework conditions for civil society activity and lead to specific recommendations for reform.</p> <p>6.4 Parties which turn against democracy should be excluded from their political party at European level and their political group in the European Parliament.</p> <p>6.5 The EESC considers that a mechanism should be considered by which failure to implement the reform recommendations could lead to corrective economic measures.</p> <p>6.6 The EESC welcomes the Commission's proposal "to strengthen the protection of the EU budget from financial risks linked to generalised deficiencies as regards the rule of law in the Member States" as a step in the right direction¹⁰¹.</p> <p>6.7 Funds withheld under the new</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee's engagement to ensure a resilient democracy in the European Union. The Commission fully supports the objective underlying the opinion, which is to ensure that our common values and rules are respected and enforced. The key issue is to identify the best means to achieve this objective.</p> <p>With its Communication on 'Further strengthening the Rule of Law within the Union – State of play and possible next steps' of 3 April 2019, the Commission launched a reflection process on the rule of law in the European Union and on setting out possible avenues for future action. All EU institutions and bodies, including the Committee, Member States, civil society organisations and other stakeholders are invited to contribute to this reflection. Building on this reflection process and the ongoing debate, the Commission put forth its own conclusions and proposals on 17 July 2019¹⁰². In this context, the Commission took into account the</p>

¹⁰⁰ [OJ C 34, 2.2.2017, p. 8.](#)

¹⁰¹ [OJ C 62, 15.2.2019, p. 173.](#)

¹⁰² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Strengthening the rule of law within the Union - A blueprint for action [COM(2019) 343].

mechanism must not be at the expense of civil society aid recipients, which should directly receive support from the EU level.

6.8 The EESC is nevertheless critical of the mechanism's exclusive focus on sound financial management. The Committee calls for provisions making it possible to initiate proceedings in the event of shortcomings in terms of democracy and the rule of law which are not directly related to sound financial management.

position expressed by the Committee in its opinion 'Resilient democracy through a strong and diverse civil society'.

The Commission welcomes the Committee's support for the Commission's proposal for a Regulation on the protection of the Union's budget in case of generalised deficiencies as regards the rule of law in the Member States. The Commission reiterates that the draft Regulation is not a sanctioning mechanism; it intends to equip the Union with the necessary tools to protect its budget when generalised deficiencies as regards the rule of law affect – or risk affecting – the sound financial management or the financial interests of the Union. The mechanism can be triggered only in case of generalised deficiencies as regards the rule of law because the respect for the rule of law is an essential precondition for the compliance with the principle of sound financial management.

The Commission shares the Committee's opinion on the importance of ensuring that the final beneficiaries of EU funding are not affected by measures adopted under the proposed Regulation. For this reason, the proposed Regulation ensures that Member States would continue to be bound by existing obligations to implement programmes and make payments to final recipients or beneficiaries, including civil society.

6.9 The EESC welcomes the European Commission's proposal to create a new cluster in the next MFF entitled "Investing in people, social cohesion and values" as a

The Commission attaches the utmost importance to the existence of a strong, free and vibrant civil society in the EU and in all the Member States. Civil

contribution to strengthening the resilience of European civil society. It particularly welcomes the creation of a new Justice, Rights and Values Fund, on which the EESC has issued an opinion¹⁰³.

6.10 The EESC also proposes that in the new MFF there should be sufficient flexibility to allow the Commission to increase support to civil society organisations if national governments reduce or stop their funding for political reasons. This additional funding should not mean replacing national funding in the long term, but should, if possible, be accompanied by a compensating reduction in support to the Member State in question in other areas.

6.11 The EESC also stresses that civil society organisations and initiatives that receive EU funding under the new MFF must make a clear commitment to European values as set out in Article 2 TEU. Organisations advocating the abolition of democracy or the rule of law, racism or xenophobia should be excluded from support.

6.12 In view of the changing participation behaviour of citizens and the growing number of informal and spontaneous initiatives, the EESC calls on the EU legislative authorities to further reduce the administrative burden associated with the application, implementation and accounting procedures for EU-supported projects and to make special support instruments available for small initiatives and organisations.

6.13 The EESC calls on the European Commission to provide better information on the existing support instruments for civil society. This should be targeted in particular at stakeholders in remote regions of the

society organisations and independent human rights bodies play an essential role in promoting, safeguarding and raising awareness of EU common values and rights. These actors empower and invigorate communities, and make institutions and governments accountable.

Both the proposals for the new EU budget and the proposed funding programmes show the firm commitment by the Commission to put people at the centre of the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

The role of civil society organisations is very important for the implementation of the Justice Rights and Values Fund proposed by the Commission within the EU Budget cluster 'Investing in People, Social Cohesion and Values'. Working together with national budgets and complementing other efforts at European and national level, the Union budget will provide concrete support to civil society in many key areas. In particular the Rights and Values programme will aim 'to protect and promote rights and values as enshrined in the EU Treaties, including by supporting civil society organisations, in order to sustain open, democratic and inclusive societies'. The role of civil society organisations is therefore recognised at the highest level, in the general objective of the programme and this is a key element of the Commission proposal.

In 2019, the Commission has introduced a new check of operational capacity of all applying organisations in the calls for proposals under the Rights, Equality and

¹⁰³ [OJ C 62, 15.2.2019, p. 178.](#)

Member States.

6.14 In order to improve compliance with the eligibility conditions for support and the principles of sound financial management by civil society actors, the EESC calls on the European Commission to increase investment in capacity-building for civil society.

Citizenship Programme and the Justice Programme. The check consists in organisations' compliance with and adherence to the values mentioned in Article 2 of the Treaty of the EU, Article 21 of the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights and the Article 3 on General objective of the Justice Programme and the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme. Hence, organisations advocating against democracy, rule of law, or supporting racism or xenophobia are excluded from support.'

The proposed regulations under the post 2020 multiannual financial framework allow taking benefit of all possibilities provided by the revised financial regulation which includes a number of novelties making access to funding much easier. For instance, applicants for Union funding will need to provide less information than before and, once provided, the data will be reused for a specific period. When verifying the financial capacity or technical expertise of future recipients, Commission services will be able to rely on available audits and assessments, already made by trusted partners such as international organisations and national agencies. To make implementation of EU funding even simpler, the use of simplified forms of grants such as lump-sums, flat rates and unit costs will be extended. There will be new forms of contributions, based on the results achieved, instead of the cost.

The Commission proposals for the Justice and the Rights and Values programmes foresee that the programmes set-up and support programme desks/national contact network to enhance knowledge of the

	<p>programme, dissemination and transferability of its results and fostering citizen outreach including in remote regions of the Member States.</p> <p>Complementing efforts at national level, EU funding will contribute to supporting, empowering and building the capacity of independent civil society organisations active in the promotion of values and rights. The Rights and Values programme will support civil society organisations and non-profit stakeholders active in the areas of the programme.</p>
<p>6.17 The EESC calls on the Commission to make proposals for better implementing the directive on work-life balance for parents and carers¹⁰⁴ in order to value volunteering and civic engagement in professional life.</p>	<p>The Directive on Work-Life Balance was adopted on 13 June 2019. Overall, the compromise reached between the co-legislators achieves the objectives of the Directive by ensuring that fathers across the EU will have the right to paid paternity leave (10 working days at sick pay level), each parent will have a parental leave of 4 months, of which at least 2 months are reserved for each parent (non-transferable between the parents) and paid, carers will be entitled to a carers' leave of at least 5 working days per year and parents with children up to at least 8 and carers will have the right to request flexible working arrangements. The Commission will monitor the implementation process.</p> <p>In the recently adopted Directive, there are not any specific work-life balance provisions for volunteering and civic engagement in professional life. However, the new Commission might take this into consideration in the future.</p>

¹⁰⁴ [COM\(2017\) 253; OJ C 129, 11.4.2018, p. 44.](#)

6.18 The EESC supports the Parliament's call to the Commission to present a proposal for the creation of a European statute for mutual societies, associations and foundations¹⁰⁵. A complementary European legal statute or an alternative system of formal interinstitutional accreditation as a first step would help civil society organisations which no longer have sufficient legal protection in their Member States.

6.19 In the EESC's view, it would be a good idea to find out why this issue has been left in abeyance and, at the same time, to consider drawing up an interinstitutional authorisation, a kind of label for NGOs. The EESC should explore this possibility.

The Commission would like to point out in this context the ongoing work at EU level to promote civil society organisations such as foundations, associations and mutual societies, e.g. through the activities of the Commission's Expert Group on Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES). The Commission had put forward proposals for European legal statutes for mutual societies, associations and foundations in the past, but they had to be withdrawn due to lack of progress in negotiations.

Concerning mutual societies: exploratory work was undertaken, however the Commission decided not to propose a European Mutual Statute on the basis of the results of a consultation held in 2013, as there appeared to be insufficient support for such legislation.

Concerning foundations: the Commission presented a proposal for a Council Regulation on the Statute for a European Foundation in 2012, but withdrew it at the end of 2014 as this proposal did not enjoy sufficient support by governments and stakeholders.

Concerning associations: a first proposal was withdrawn by the Commission in 2001 due to insufficient progress. Later on, after the withdrawal of the proposal on a European Foundation, the Commission decided not to propose a new draft Regulation for a European Association Statute as the endorsement of such an initiative by the Council seemed unlikely (unanimity required).

¹⁰⁵ [EP declaration, 10 March 2011.](#)

<p>6.20 The EESC calls on the EU institutions to implement the provisions of Article 11 TEU and to further strengthen participatory democracy at Union level through the involvement of representative associations and civil society, moving from consultation to a true dialogue.</p>	<p>The Commission shares the view that a true dialogue with the civil society and representative associations is of utmost importance and acts accordingly throughout all relevant stages of the work carried out by the Commission.</p>
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<p>N°14 The White Dove Way – Proposal for an EU-led global peace-building strategy (own-initiative opinion) EESC 2018/1717 - REX/504 542nd Plenary session – March 2019 Rapporteur: Jane MORRICE (UK-III) FPI – HR/VP Federica MOGHERINI</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.3 (...) the EESC is calling for the new EU budget to devote greatly increased funds to conflict prevention in all EU external relations peace programmes (...)</p> <p>1.8 The EESC urges the EU to create a new Global Peace-building Strategy with three strands:</p> <p>Strand 1 – conflict prevention, civil society, coherence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - doubling of peace building funding in all related EU policies with a focus on conflict prevention, reconciliation and intercultural dialogue promoting tolerance and respect at home and abroad (...) <p>5. New EU budget (MFF) to maximise peace-building and civil society inclusion (...)</p>	<p>The Commission cannot pre-empt the outcome of the negotiations in the context of the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. The consultation, preparation and adoption of the content of future external relations programmes will be conducted in line with the legal provisions once these are adopted.</p>
<p>1.3 (...) the EESC is calling (...) for greater coherence and cohesion between internal and external trade, aid, development and security policies.</p> <p>1.8 The EESC urges the EU to create a new Global Peace-building Strategy with three strands:</p> <p>Strand 1 – conflict prevention, civil society,</p>	<p>In June 2016, the High Representative presented the document ‘Shared vision, common action: A stronger Europe. A global strategy for the European Union’s foreign and security policy’¹⁰⁶. The Global Strategy calls explicitly for the EU to ‘adopt a joined-up approach to its humanitarian, development, migration, trade, investment, infrastructure, education, health and research policies, as well as</p>

¹⁰⁶ http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2016/160628_02_en.htm

<p>coherence (...)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - greater cohesion and coherence between the EU defence, aid, trade and conflict resolution strategies in all those countries where the EU operates worldwide; - greater coordination at inter-agency and inter-state level and exchange of experience with grassroots local, national and international state and non-state peace-building organisations (...) <p>4.1 Leading the Way – injecting EU leadership into global peace-building</p> <p>By actively supporting the creation of stable, just, fair and prosperous societies around the world, the EU goes further than promoting peace. While EU efforts may not always be as successful as wished, the promotion of EU values encourages countries experiencing conflict to move beyond violence. (...) Also, by creating greater coherence and cohesion between its cultural, defence, aid, trade and conflict resolution strategies and with international agencies, the EU could take the lead in global peace-building.</p>	<p>improve horizontal coherence between the EU and its Member States’. It also proposes to ‘nurture societal resilience also by deepening work on education, culture and youth to foster pluralism, coexistence and respect.’</p> <p>Implementation of the principles and priorities included in the Global Strategy remains a priority for the Commission and is in line with the Committee’s opinion. Annual reports on the Strategy’s implementation are published.</p>
<p>1.4 The EESC strongly recommends greater involvement of civil society in the decision-making process (...)</p> <p>5.3 Civil society inclusion – focus on women and youth</p> <p>It is increasingly accepted that civil society is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of any peace-building strategy. Cooperation with grassroots actors serves not only to increase understanding of conflict from the bottom up, but also local "ownership" of the process by helping promote more "conflict-</p>	<p>Through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the Commission provides critical funding to support civil society in conflict-affected contexts.</p> <p>This includes direct support to in-country civil society actors in conflict prevention, peace-building and crisis preparedness and response.</p> <p>In line with the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) Multiannual Indicative Programme, support to civil society under the crisis preparedness component of the IcSP (Article 4) is</p>

<p>sensitive" peace-building and positive reinforcement. UN Resolution 2419 highlights the role of young people in negotiating and implementing peace agreements as does UN Resolution 1325 on the role of women. Trade union activity and business, large or small, also has a vital role to play in the mobilisation of civil society. Vulnerable groups, particularly victims, must receive expert attention and the "good neighbourly" approach to relations in the community and the workplace is also important. "Structured dialogue" between the EU and civil society also creates ground-breaking and lasting relationships as evidenced by the EESC in relations with EU neighbours in Africa, Asia and beyond.</p>	<p>focusing on: (i) strengthening institutional and operational capacity of civil society actors to undertake conflict prevention and peace-building initiatives; (ii) improving in-country civil society actors networking and advocacy skills, including increased civil society involvement in conflict prevention and peace-building; and (iii) establishing or enhancing dialogue between civil society actors and local, national, regional or international institutions on subjects related to conflict prevention and peace-building.</p> <p>Such support includes important initiatives related to UN Resolutions 1325 and 2419 and more generally on the role of young people and of women in conflict and peace. Under the crisis response (Article 3, non-programmable) component of the IcSP, the Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) also supports the role of civil society to act as key players of transitions and peace processes.</p> <p>Through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (Article 4), the Commission also supports the Civil Society Dialogue Network. The network is a mechanism established in 2010 for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on peace and conflict that is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) in co-operation with the Commission and the European External Action Service¹⁰⁷. The current support lasts until 2020.</p>
<p>5.2 Focus on conflict prevention</p> <p>(...) In 2017, the EU adopted a regulation creating new support under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) to foster capacity building of military</p>	<p>The Commission is aware of the reservations made by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office on the Capacity Building in support of Security and Development (CBSD) and is engaged</p>

¹⁰⁷ <http://eplo.org/activities/ongoing-projects/civil-society-dialogue-network/>

<p>actors – Capacity Building in support of Security and Development (CBSD). The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) repeatedly raises concerns about this and the need to have greater civil society input.</p>	<p>in a constructive dialogue with civil society to respond to these concerns. Based on initial lessons learnt and implementation of the first Capacity Building in support of Security and Development actions, dialogue with civil society will take place, notably with a planned meeting in the framework of the above-mentioned Civil Society Dialogue Network. It should also be noted that local civil society is consulted when designing Capacity Building in support of Security and Development interventions, within the limits imposed by the nature of crisis response interventions and the need for rapid response.</p>
<p>5.2 Focus on conflict prevention (...) Crucially, the EC proposal for an "off-budget" EUR 10.5 bn "European Peace Facility" for joint engagement in non-EU countries is ideal for ensuring that EU action will be genuinely geared towards conflict prevention.</p>	<p>The Commission thanks for this comment, but would like to clarify that the proposal for the European Peace Facility is not a Commission proposal but a proposal by the High Representative with Commission support.</p>

<p>N°15 Connecting Europe and Asia – building blocks for an EU Strategy JOIN(2018) 31 final EESC-2019-00209-00-00-AC-TRA – REX/505 542nd Plenary session – March 2019 Rapporteur: Jonathan PEEL (Gr. I-UK) DG MOVE – Commissioner BULC</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.2.2 The EESC questions why no reference is made to current connectivity initiatives regarding transport and energy, such as the Intergovernmental Commission for the Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia (TRACECA).</p>	<p>On the basis of the Regulation on Union Guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network¹⁰⁸, the Commission has adopted a Delegated Regulation for an indicative extension of the trans-European transport network to the Eastern Partnership Region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine)¹⁰⁹. In that context, the Commission and the World Bank co-authored in January 2019 an indicative TEN-T investment plan (volume EUR 13 billion until 2030) for these countries. The Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia (TRACECA) action should, in the future, build on the strong EU-law based approach.</p>
<p>1.2.2 No mention whatsoever of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – despite the fact that the BRI is not only directed towards Europe but affects every other Asian country as well, and in spite of it proposing actual trade, infrastructure and financial support;</p>	<p>The aim of the strategy is to develop and present an overall comprehensive European approach to connectivity with all key Asian partners and without focusing on one specific initiative. The document is not and should not be seen as a response to Chinese Belt and Road Initiative Initiative, as Europe has a range of partners in Asia and it is important to</p>

¹⁰⁸ Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network and repealing Decision No 661/2010/EU (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 348, 20.12.2013.

¹⁰⁹ Commission Delegated Regulation of 9 December 2018 on the indicative extension of the TEN-T core and comprehensive networks.

	enhance connectivity with all of them.
<p>1.2.2</p> <p>No attempt to link transport and the need for infrastructure in the region with, for example Sustainable Development Goal 9, which covers infrastructure;</p> <p>1.9.1</p> <p>The EESC also repeats its 2015 recommendation that the EU should put greater effort into getting results from TRACECA “to speed up the development of a sustainable infrastructure chain, ensuring multi-modal transport (notably rail and road infrastructure) through linking the corridor with the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-Ts).</p>	<p>The EU Strategy on connecting Europe and Asia has a wider scope than “transport and infrastructure” connectivity. Hence, the reference to the objective of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on which the EU has taken its commitments via separate acts.</p>
<p>1.4 and 1.4.1</p> <p>The EESC believes that it is imperative that the EU makes a formal response to the BRI.</p> <p>Many had been expecting this Communication to form a key part of the EU response to the BRI, but it is not mentioned. Originally the BRI was called the "Silk Road Economic Belt" – the "Silk Road" being the historic EU-Asia connectivity route. The EU already has a Strategic Partnership with China. The BRI looks to build actual links between Asia and Europe: the Communication is far more nebulous.</p>	<p>See response to 1.2.2</p> <p>In the area of transport connectivity the European Commission has established in 2015 the EU-China Connectivity Platform, where both sides seek to exchange information, share regulatory approaches and seek for synergies between the European and Chinese connectivity initiatives, namely the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The work on connectivity with China and the potential links with the BRI will continue in this setting, following the approach set in the EU Strategy for Connecting Europe and Asia.</p>
<p>1.9 The EESC was surprised to read only that the EU “should work towards connecting the well –developed Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T) framework with the networks in Asia”: we repeat our recommendation first made in 2011 that China’s and the EU’s proposed transport</p>	<p>Within the framework of the EU – China Connectivity Platform, the EU and China will launch a joint study on railway corridors, connecting the EU and China. Building on the methodology used in TEN-T policy and ensuring coherence between TEN-T, it will be extended to</p>

<p>corridors become fully aligned, especially rail infrastructure where possible.</p>	<p>cover the Eastern Partnership countries and the Western Balkans regions as well as other countries concerned by Europe – Asia transport infrastructure connections.</p>
<p>6.1.1 The EESC questions why so little, if any, reference is made to many recent, critically important developments affecting both the EU and Asia. There is, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reference under "people-to-people connectivity" to any of the existing civil society dialogues between EU and Asia, especially the flagship civil society monitoring bodies set up under these trade agreements; • No attempt to evaluate the potential role for civil society, despite this active monitoring role, especially given there is little such tradition across Asia; • No attempt to examine social issues, despite these often being a key topic for such bodies - including implementation of core ILO conventions, promotion of gender equality (Sustainable Development Goal 5), or even human rights; 	<p>There are several references to the importance of social rights in the Communication, including with regard to how the EU defines sustainable connectivity, and how it should be implemented, as well as that “ensuring adequate social conditions to workers in the sector and fair competition between road transport undertakings are key.” The International Labour Organization (ILO) is referenced as a standard for social rights within international cooperation, while the need to “support corporate social responsibility initiatives to implement international standards for the financing of connectivity-related projects” is also specifically mentioned.</p> <p>The European Commission implements many actions in Asia in support of civil society, i.e. governance and change. It provides assistance through many programmes that aim at strengthening civil society organisations, promoting multi-stakeholder dialogues and fostering the inclusion of civil society organisations in the policy-making process regarding a wide range of issues.</p>
<p>6.1.1 The Committee notes that, whereas for Africa there are EU support instruments for European businesses and consortia, these do not exist for Asia-Europe connections. Not least as this puts such businesses at a disadvantage compared with Chinese companies that are supported by the BRI, we believe that the Commission now needs to extend this policy in place for Africa, and that</p>	<p>The Commission supports trade-facilitation and improvement to business and investment environment in the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region through the EU-ASEAN economic and trade connectivity programme (ARISE Plus) – implemented in close association of the EU and ASEAN business representatives in the region. In this context, a variety of</p>

<p>InvestEU be extended to cover investment risks both in Asia as well as in other parts of the world. Such support shall be equally carried out respecting workers' rights in procurement procedures also in third countries receiving foreign investments.</p>	<p>practical trade and business tools have been designed for the use of the private sector working cross-border in ASEAN region. The Commission also supports EU-ASEAN Business dialogue between the EU-ASEAN Business Council and the ASEAN Business Advisory Council, through the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI) policy dialogue facility. This activity of the Commission promotes useful exchanges between the two business communities and the EU and ASEAN policy-makers.</p>
<p>6.3 The Communication has disappointingly little to say about human rights (due perhaps to the diversity across Asia), the rule of law, good governance and democratisation.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that all these are crucial elements of sustainable connectivity. Good governance, for example, is explicitly referred to several times throughout the document, to this and its constituent elements.</p>

<p>N°16 European standardisation for 2019 COM(2018) 686 final EESC 2019/112 - INT/878 542nd Plenary session – March 2019 Rapporteur: Elżbieta SZADZIŃSKA (GR. III-PL) DG GROW - Commissioner BIENKOWSKA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.5 The inter-institutional dialogue fed into this year's work programme and, in the Committee's view, further dialogue in future will help strengthen the European standardisation system. Even in its earlier opinions on standardisation, the Committee expressed its willingness to set up an ad hoc forum that would involve a wide range of stakeholders¹¹⁰.</p> <p>1.8 (and 3.12) The Committee reiterates its call for monitoring the efforts of key standardisation players, which are aimed at involving the broadest possible range of stakeholders in the European standardisation system. The EESC could, in particular, create an ad hoc forum on inclusiveness in the European standardisation system. This body would be responsible for organising an annual public hearing to evaluate progress made in this area¹¹¹.</p>	<p>The Commission promotes inclusiveness and transparency continuously, an integral part of the European Standardisation System. Dialogue and stakeholder participation is underscored, <i>inter alia</i>, through wide Commission's consultation, in the process of drawing up requests, of interested parties including social partners, consumers, small and medium-sized enterprises, industry associations and Member States. Furthermore, the Commission closely monitors the way in which the European standardisation organisations implement the requirement of effective participation of Annex III organisations, pursuant to Article 5 of the European Standardisation Regulation (EU) 1025/2012¹¹².</p> <p>Thanks to joint efforts by the European Standardisation Organisations and Annex III organisations, several mechanisms are already in place to tackle this issue, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the societal stakeholders, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and inclusiveness (3SI) programme launched

¹¹⁰ [OJ C 303, 19.8.2016, p. 81](#); [OJ C 75, 10.3.2017, p. 40](#); [OJ C 197, 8.6.2018, p. 17](#).

¹¹¹ [OJ C 197, 8.6.2018, p. 17](#).

¹¹² Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on European standardisation, amending Council Directives 89/686/EEC and 93/15/EEC and Directives 94/9/EC, 94/25/EC, 95/16/EC, 97/23/EC, 98/34/EC, 2004/22/EC, 2007/23/EC, 2009/23/EC and 2009/105/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Decision 87/95/EEC and Decision No 1673/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council Text with EEA relevance; OJ L 316, 14.11.2012, p. 12–33.

at European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) to increase the visibility of SMEs' and societal stakeholders' interests in ETSI standardisation work. This includes a very active role of the 3SI Advocate, tasked with providing support to all the members of the Institute on inclusiveness matters, as well as with collecting views and opinions raised by the representatives of societal stakeholders and SMEs concerning adopted European Standards, and transmitting them to relevant committees of the European Telecommunications Standards Institute.

- the 'Opinion' mechanism introduced in the European Committee for standardisation (CEN) and the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation (CENELEC), whereby Annex III organisations who have signed as partnership agreement with CEN or CENELEC have the right to submit an Opinion on a (final) draft of a European standard before vote and adoption by these committees.

The Commission will continue to work closely with European Standardisation Organisations and Annex III organisations to enhance further the inclusiveness and transparency of the European Standardisation System and to address possible remaining obstacles thereto.

The interinstitutional dialogue which was introduced with the standardisation package {COM(2016) 358} on 1 June 2016, provides the forum for a structured dialogue on standardisation policy. The Commission is open to suggestions to maximise the benefits from this dialogue.

<p>N°17 Harmonised standards COM(2018) 764 final EESC 2019/116 - INT/879 542nd Plenary session – March 2019 Rapporteur: Gerardo LARGHI (GR. II-IT) DG GROW – Commissioner BIENKOWSKA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.4 The Committee reiterates its call for greater support for stakeholder involvement, including by strengthening and better publicising the financial instruments already available (H2020). To this end, this funding should be maintained and, if possible, increased in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027). The same recommendation applies to funding for the stakeholders referred to in Annex III of Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012. In addition, in order to make the standardisation process more inclusive, the EESC confirms its willingness to host an annual multi-stakeholder forum to assess the progress made in this regard, as well as facilitating exchange of good practices between different production sectors. [+ points 4.5 to 4.9]</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the Committee’s remarks. The Commission wishes to recall that inclusiveness and transparency are fundamental elements of the European Standardisation System and as such, the Commission unceasingly promotes them. In particular, the Commission closely monitors the implementation of Article 5 of Regulation (EU) 1025/2012¹¹³ when it comes to effective participation of all relevant stakeholders, including small and medium-sized enterprises, consumer organisations and environmental and social stakeholders in standardisation. Thanks to joint efforts by the European Standardisation Organisations and Annex III organisations, several mechanisms are already in place to tackle this issue, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the 3SI Programme (Societal Stakeholders, SMEs and Inclusiveness) launched at the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) to increase the visibility of the interests of SMEs and societal stakeholders in the Institute’s standardisation work. This includes a very active role of the 3SI

¹¹³ Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on European standardisation, amending Council Directives 89/686/EEC and 93/15/EEC and Directives 94/9/EC, 94/25/EC, 95/16/EC, 97/23/EC, 98/34/EC, 2004/22/EC, 2007/23/EC, 2009/23/EC and 2009/105/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Decision 87/95/EEC and Decision No 1673/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council Text with EEA relevance; OJ L 316, 14.11.2012, p. 12–33.

	<p>Advocate, tasked with providing support to all members of the Institute on inclusiveness matters, as well as with collecting views and opinions raised by the representatives of societal stakeholders and SMEs concerning adopted European Standards, and transmitting them to relevant committees of the European Telecommunications Standards Institute.</p> <p>- the 'Opinion' mechanism introduced in CEN-CENELEC, whereby Annex III organisations who have signed a partnership agreement with the European Committee for standardisation (CEN) or the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation (CENELEC) have the right to submit an Opinion on a (final) draft of a European standard before vote and adoption by these committees.</p> <p>The Commission will continue to work closely with European Standardisation Organisations and Annex III organisations to enhance further the inclusiveness and transparency of the European Standardisation System and to address possible remaining obstacles thereto.</p> <p>Standardisation will be part of the Single Market Programme¹¹⁴ under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and all the funding options will be explored in the context of that programme.</p> <p>The interinstitutional dialogue which was introduced with the standardisation package {COM(2016)358} on 1 June 2016, provides the forum for a structured dialogue on standardisation policy. The Commission is open to suggestions to maximise the benefits from this dialogue.</p>
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¹¹⁴ COM(2018)441.

<p>5.1 The Committee calls on the Commission to better clarify the aspect of funding of the consultants, emphasising the need to set aside funding commensurate with the challenges in the sector and in line with the objectives of Regulation (EU) 1025/2012.</p>	<p>The Commission wishes to clarify that the system of the so-called Harmonised Standards (HAS) consultants was launched on 1 April 2018, with a contracted budget of EUR 4.25 million for the first 24 months of the contract. One of the key tasks of the contractor is to ensure the right allocation of consultants to technical committees, having due regard to the policy priorities taken up in the Annual Union Work Programme for European Standardisation and the provisions of Regulation (EU) 1025/2012.</p>
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N°18 Challenges and Industrial Change in the EU Aerospace Sector (own-initiative opinion)
EESC 2018/1123 - CCMI/158
538th Plenary Session – October 2018
Rapporteur: Thomas KROPP (GR.I-DE)
Co-rapporteur: Enrico GIBELLIERI (Cat.2-IT)
DG GROW – Commissioner BIENKOWSKA

Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential

European Commission position

1.1. The need to develop an **EU industrial policy for the aeronautical sector** to allow the EU aeronautical industry to compete on a level playing-field in the context of strong competition from established players (the USA in particular) as well as growing competition from emerging players (China in particular). In this context, the need to establish an **aeronautics watchtower** at EU level and to make aeronautics a key element of EU economic diplomacy and trade policy.

Making European industry stronger and more competitive is a top priority of the Commission that monitors closely and fully recognises the challenges facing the European aeronautics industry.

The Commission has strongly defended the interests of the European Union industry to ensure a level playing field globally. Inter alia, the EU is actively using the World Trade Organization Dispute Settlement Mechanism to challenge illegal subsidies to the United States aerospace industry, closely monitors the emergence of new players such as China (aerospace is one of the sectors in the Made in China 2025 initiative) and has tackled various market access barriers in third countries, ranging from certification of certain aircraft in China to the re-export of repaired aircraft parts to South Korea. The Commission will continue to use all available tools to pursue EU interests in the sector.

The ability to address the need to decarbonise aviation transport and adapt to the speed of technological innovation are essential to the success of the European industry. The renewed industrial policy strategy adopted by the

	<p>Commission in 2017 brings together in a coordinated way a wide range of actions necessary to address these challenges (i.e. digitisation, cybersecurity, skills, low-carbon and circular economy, research and innovation, etc.)</p>
<p>1.2. The challenges in relation to skills, including ensuring that a highly specialised ageing workforce has the opportunity to share their expertise and skills with younger employees, the need to attract more young employees to the sector with increasingly sought-after skills in both engineering and ICT, and the urgent need for existing workers to be upskilled in the field of digitalisation.</p> <p>13.1. The continued success of the EU aeronautical industry is also highly dependent on its ability to attract skilled labour. In the context of an ageing workforce and new technological challenges (digitalisation, automation, cybersecurity, industry 4.0), this requires an overall EU strategy to develop EU education and training programmes with life-long learning and high-quality training provisions at its core.</p>	<p>The European Commission overall agrees with the Committee’s assessment of these challenges. Principle one of the European Pillar of Social Rights on ‘Education, Training and Lifelong Learning’ highlights the need to successfully manage transitions in the labour market. This is why the European Commission takes a holistic approach on up-skilling and reskilling, including through a new Staff Working Document on implementation of the ‘Upskilling Pathways for Adults’ (SWD(2019)89)¹¹⁵.</p> <p>Further, under the strategic framework for European cooperation in Education and Training (ET2020), the Vocational Education and Training Working Group on innovation and digitalisation is examining how vocational education and training can be made more modern and flexible to take into account new technologies, learning environments and labour markets.</p> <p>The brand-new Centres of Vocational Excellence under Erasmus strategic partnership strand aim at connecting vocational education and training centres at local level to regional smart specialisation strategies and the knowledge triangle - involving Research and Development, vocational education and training and business/industry - to strengthen skills provision, in addition to creating transnational platforms of</p>

¹¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf

vocational excellence in Europe.

On apprenticeships, the Commission has launched demand-led support services in November 2018 to help Member States improve their systems. Further, Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships sets out a common European understanding on the subject and Member States should implement it by March 2021.

Science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) taught in school increase the inclination of learners to opt for technical or natural sciences occupations. Therefore, the Commission encourages Member states to balance these subjects with key competences and soft skills.

The 2016 Skills Agenda for Europe addresses digital skills:

- Upskilling pathways helping low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of digital skills.
- The revision of the Key Competences Framework (adopted by the Commission on 17 January 2018) which includes digital competences.
- The Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills emphasises the importance of digital skills in changing and emerging job profiles and related training, regardless of the economic sector. Erasmus+ Sector Skills Alliances implement the Blueprint in sectors identified by the Commission.

Action 9 of the 2018 Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition action plan promotes existing tools supporting the acquisition and assessment of digital skills such as the digital competence framework.

<p>1.3. The need for civil aviation research to remain a top priority in Horizon Europe with an increased budget compared to Horizon 2020. In this context, to ensure the continuation of the successful technology initiatives to reduce the environmental impact of emissions through the launch of Clean Sky 3 and SESAR 3.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>Civil Aviation research, through Horizon Europe initiatives and national research programmes, should deliver technological and operational advancements and contribute to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Clean Planet for all’ the EU strategic long-term vision for a climate-neutral economy; • ‘the renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy’ – that should help the EU meeting the major challenges of the transition to a digital, competitive, safe, sustainable economy. <p>The Commission has proposed and supports an impact-oriented approach to the prioritisation of the upcoming Research and Innovation programmes and initiatives.</p>
<p>1.4. The urgent need to deploy SESAR solutions and establish the Single European Sky (SES) after decades of discussions. The need to invest in efficient capacity in the air and on the ground in order to facilitate aviation growth while reducing its environmental impact and increasing safety levels.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees with the recommendation. In order to accelerate the deployment of Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research (SESAR) solutions, the Commission has set up in 2014 a deployment framework. The deployment of essential technologies needing synchronisation across the EU is coordinated by the SESAR Deployment Manager and is supported by the Union through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Programme.</p> <p>In order to better address the future challenges, in the context of growing capacity and environmental concerns, the Commission has launched, in addition to ongoing collective reflections with representative stakeholders on the future of SES, several initiatives aimed at</p>

	<p>shaping the future Single European Sky regulatory framework:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) an Airspace Architecture Study carrying out by the SESAR joint undertaking with Network manager support and 2) an updated air traffic management (ATM) Master Plan outlining the research priorities for the next decade.
<p>1.5. The need to strengthen the international role of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the need for more performance-based EASA rules to enable more efficient deployment of new technology in a safe manner and a level playing field for EU exporters.</p>	<p>The new European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) Basic Regulation¹¹⁶, in force since September 2018, strengthens further the Agency’s role in promoting to the harmonisation of rules, the mutual recognition of certificates, in the interest of European industry, and the promotion of European aviation safety standards.</p> <p>Aviation safety research activities funded under the 7th Framework Programme and Horizon 2020 have significantly contributed to the establishment of performance-based rules. The new basic regulation enshrines now the principle that requirements and procedures should be developed in a manner which is performance-based and which focuses on objectives to be achieved.</p>
<p>1.6. The need to find solutions for an efficient post-Brexit agreement covering: customs arrangements, regulatory frameworks, cooperation in research and deployment and labour mobility. Technical discussions covering regulations need to begin as a matter of priority, to ensure that mitigation measures are in place.</p>	<p>Post-Brexit contingency measures for the aviation sector have been proposed by the Commission on 19 December 2018 and adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in March 2019. The Committee has addressed these draft regulations in the opinion TEN/688 adopted on 20 February 2019. Whilst such</p>

¹¹⁶ Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 July 2018 on common rules in the field of civil aviation and establishing a European Union Aviation Safety Agency, and amending Regulations (EC) No 2111/2005, (EC) No 1008/2008, (EU) No 996/2010, (EU) No 376/2014 and Directives 2014/30/EU and 2014/53/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Regulations (EC) No 552/2004 and (EC) No 216/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EEC) No 3922/91 (Text with EEA relevance.); PE/2/2018/REV/1; OJ L 212, 22.8.2018, p. 1–122.

	<p>contingency measures cannot and should not attempt to replicate the benefits of Union membership, they do however seek to mitigate the most disruptive impact of a no-deal Brexit to the EU27 industry. The measures proposed are unilateral, so the implementation discussions will take place in the Union context.</p>
<p>1.7. The need to progress on EU Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) screening, with the aim of protecting critical technologies for EU aeronautical manufacturing and MRO industries.</p>	<p>The Regulation establishing a framework for screening of foreign direct investments into the European Union¹¹⁷ was published on 21 March 2019 and it entered into force in April 2019 and shall apply as from October 2020. It will facilitate screening of foreign investments having effects on, inter alia, critical technologies in aerospace, when they threaten security or public order in one or several Member States, or in the whole Union.</p> <p>While welcoming Foreign Direct Investment into the sector which undergoes rapid transformation and is increasingly driven by technological advancement, the Commission will ensure that such investments do not affect our security and public order interests.</p>
<p>1.8. The need to ensure continued social dialogue between employers, employees and civil society. Furthermore, the need to launch a sector-specific social dialogue for the aeronautical industry under Council Decision 98/500/EC.</p>	<p>The Commission is very supportive of social dialogue in general and sectoral social dialogue in particular. This was demonstrated by the New Start for Social Dialogue of 2015 and the follow-up actions taken since then. It should be noted that the aeronautical industry is part of the metal sector and is therefore already covered by the corresponding Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee.</p>

¹¹⁷ Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 March 2019 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union, OJ L 79I , 21.3.2019, p. 1–14.

<p>N°19 Industrial change in the health sector (own-initiative opinion) EESC 2017/2848 - CCMI/153 532nd Plenary Session – February 2018 Rapporteur: Joost VAN IERSEL (GR.I-NL) Corapporteur: Enrico GIBELLIERI (GR.II-IT) DG GROW – Commissioner BIENKOWSKA</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.11. The EESC is of the opinion that public procurement has a major role in launching projects with advanced technologies. The Commission should ensure effective public procurement across the Union in line with Directive 2014/12.</p>	<p>Public procurement is a key driver for innovative projects, in particular in the health sector. Not only is it an obligation but above all an opportunity to obtain better value for money. As is the case for other directives, the Commission, as guardian of the Treaty, should indeed ensure effective public procurement across the Union in line with Directive 2014/24/EU.</p>
<p>1.12. The EESC considers that within the broader context of national approaches there are many region based initiatives. The Commission should promote exchange of successful experiences. Bilateral contacts between public and private health authorities must be encouraged.</p>	<p>The European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for smart specialisation investments (ESCP-S3) shall facilitate cluster cooperation in thematic areas related to regional smart specialisation strategies and to increase the involvement of the industry in the context of the Smart Specialisation Platform for Industrial Modernisation¹¹⁸. One of the thematic areas of the platform is, precisely, medical technology.</p> <p>The objective of this European Strategic Cluster Partnerships action is to foster the collaboration of enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as their interaction with technology centres both within clusters and across regional and sectoral silos. The aim is towards generating</p>

¹¹⁸ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/industrial-modernisation>.

	<p>joint actions and investment projects and a sustainable partnering process for strategic interregional collaboration in common smart specialisation priority areas linked to industrial modernisation and to help improving their business environment.</p> <p>The European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for smart specialisation investments are expected to start operation by the end of 2019.</p>
<p>1.13. The EESC recommends that the European Semester and CSRs¹¹⁹ also examines the effect of technological change on the transformation of health systems.</p>	<p>The European Semester already addresses issues requiring structural reforms in health systems at Member State level. To ensure fiscal sustainability and maintain universal access to quality healthcare, Member States need to increase cost-effectiveness by investing in innovation.</p>
<p>1.15. The EESC considers the human factor paramount. The transition to new health and care requires an open mind and new forms of professionalism in industry at all levels, as well as a redesign of health and care related work. The European social dialogue in health and social services that is in place since 2006 should be reinforced in view of adequate education and training programmes as well as to upgrade the quality of working conditions and work places.</p>	<p>In accordance with Articles 165 and 168 of the Treaty on Functioning of the European Union, it is primarily the competence of the Member States to decide upon education and training and regulation of health professionals. In doing so Member States have to respect European Union law and in particular the single market freedoms. Regulation restricting access to or exercise of professional activities must be justified by an overriding reason in the public interest and be proportionate.</p> <p>In 2018, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Directive <i>on a proportionality test before adopting new regulation of professions</i> (2018/958)¹²⁰. This Directive obliges</p>

¹¹⁹ Country Specific Recommendations

¹²⁰ Directive (EU) 2018/958 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 June 2018 on a proportionality test before adoption of new regulation of professions, OJ L 173, 9.7.2018, p. 25–34.

	<p>Member states to duly justify new regulation in the light of a catalogue of criteria and requirements to make sure that it is necessary and proportionate.</p> <p>Directive 2005/36/EC¹²¹, sets minimum training requirements in respect to doctors, dentists, nurses of general care, pharmacists and midwives. These requirements refer to years and hours of training, to knowledge and skills to be acquired and, for some professions, specific topics are listed that have to be taught during the education.</p> <p>Outside these competences, it is the Member States that set up education programmes and quality control for education and training of health professionals and the related work environment.</p>
<p>6.12. Digitalisation and Big Data not only favour the proliferation of individual sensors and devices, they also play a key role in new diagnostics, research and prevention as well as in supporting patient-empowerment and self-management, while opening up optimal solutions for integrated care. The exchange of patients' data will be critical for interoperability.</p>	<p>As a result of the recent advances in digitalisation and Big Data, individual sensors and devices are proliferating, and they play a key role in new diagnostics, research and prevention as well as in supporting patient-empowerment and self-management, while opening up optimal solutions for integrated care. The interoperability will be critical for the exchange and pooling of data, not only of patients' data but also of other types of data coming from various sources, to create new insights and deliver better care.</p>

¹²¹ Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications (Text with EEA relevance) (OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22).

<p>N°20 Promoting healthy and sustainable diets in the EU (own-initiative opinion) EESC 2018/4568 - NAT/755 541st Plenary session – February 2019 Rapporteur: Peter SCHMIDT (Gr. II-DE) DG SANTE – Commissioner ANDRIUKAITIS</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.3. The EESC mentions that a coordinated approach to promote healthy and sustainable diets is missing.</p>	<p>The Commission’s recent reflection paper ‘Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030’, outlines a comprehensive approach entailing a genuine change in the way food is produced, transformed, consumed and distributed by accelerating the transition to a sustainable food system based on circular circular economy principles.</p> <p>In addition, as part of a European Green Deal announced by the President-elect, the political guidelines for the next Commission call for the new ‘Farm to Fork’ strategy on sustainable food along the whole value chain.</p>
<p>1.4. The EESC calls for the development of new Sustainable Dietary Guidelines that incorporate policy objectives on health, the environment and the economy as well as accounting for geographical and cultural differences.</p>	<p>The Commission wishes to inform that the Joint Research Centre published a database of national food-based dietary guidelines¹²² in 2019 in the context of the Knowledge Gateway and Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. However, the Member States (through the High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity) decided against common messages.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention</p>

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	<p>and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases is instrumental in maximising joint efforts with Member States to reach internationally set policy goals, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2025 World Health Organization (WHO) targets on non-communicable diseases. This Steering Group allows Member States to identify priority areas and actions and to collect and implement validated best practices for transfer to other Member States and for further up-scaling with European Union funding. In 2018 nutrition was chosen as one area for priority implementation.</p>
<p>1.6. The EESC calls for the creation of an Expert group to formulate Europe-wide sustainable dietary guidelines.</p>	<p>Concerning the establishment of 'common' guidelines, see comments on point 1.4.</p> <p>The Commission considers that discussions about sustainable dietary guidelines and healthy diets based on a sustainable food system go beyond human health and dietary aspects and extend to areas such as food security and accessibility, environment, climate and biodiversity, equity, fair trade, economic viability and resilience of farming. The possible creation of an expert group is only one of the possible tools to discuss the multidimensional nature of the different issues involved.</p>
<p>1.7. The EESC reiterates the importance of investing in education on sustainable diets from an early age, to help young people appreciate the "value of food". Special attention must be paid to vulnerable groups, especially people on low incomes.</p>	<p>The EU school scheme is designed to help promote the benefits of healthy eating to children and encourage them to increase their consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk.</p> <p>Considering the role played by this scheme, it has been proposed to keep the budget for the participating</p>

	Member States, despite the very difficult overall budgetary context.
1.8. The EESC highlights that a common European food labelling approach reflecting Sustainable Dietary Guidelines would improve transparency and discourage the use of unnecessarily cheap raw materials that are both unhealthy and unsustainable (e.g. trans fats, palm oil and excess sugars). Consumers would benefit from extension to food labelling, to include environmental and social aspects. This would help drive consumers' choices towards healthier and more sustainable options.	The Commission recalls that pursuant to Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 ¹²³ on food information to consumers, the provision of nutrition information has become mandatory on nearly every food package in the EU since December 2016.
1.9. The EESC calls for the revision of the Green Public Procurement Guidelines criteria for food and catering services.	<p>The Commission confirms that it is currently revising the EU Green Public Procurement criteria for food, catering services and vending machines. It expects to finalise and publish the Guidelines within 2019.</p> <p>The Commission prepared, for the Maltese EU Presidency, a report on public procurement of food for health in the school setting, a tool which offers operational guidance to schools for translating existing healthy school food standards into procurement specifications.</p> <p>In addition, the Commission informs that public procurement is one of the issues that will be addressed in the new Joint Action on the implementation of best practices under the 2019 work programme for the Union's action in</p>

¹²³ Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, amending Regulations (EC) No 1924/2006 and (EC) No 1925/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Commission Directive 87/250/EEC, Council Directive 90/496/EEC, Commission Directive 1999/10/EC, Directive 2000/13/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, Commission Directives 2002/67/EC and 2008/5/EC and Commission Regulation (EC) No 608/2004 Text with EEA relevance; OJ L 304, 22.11.2011, p. 18–63.

<p>1.10. Competition law should not be an obstacle to developing Sustainable Dietary Guidelines. Rules should be adapted to help the local economy rather than hinder sustainability. To ensure a better distribution of the added value for the stakeholders across the food supply chain, the EESC welcomes the possibility introduced for all sectors by the 2013 reform of the Common Market Organisation Regulation (the CMO Regulation). Products which are produced in a more sustainable manner in terms of environmental, animal health and quality standards, might enable operators in the food supply chain to obtain better prices. Pre-notification talks with the Commission can help inter-branch organisations to shape any possible future notification.</p>	<p>the field of health.</p> <p>The Omnibus Regulation (EU) No 2017/2393¹²⁴ improved the possibilities for producers in all agricultural sectors to cooperate. Recognised producer organisations can for instance engage in joint production planning or joint quality control. Producer organisations can also pursue the objectives of optimising returns on investments in response to environmental and animal welfare standards.</p> <p>Recognised inter-branch organisations may notify their agreements according to Article 210 of the Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 on common organisation of the markets in agricultural products (CMO)¹²⁵ to the Commission. The Commission will investigate whether such sustainability agreements fulfil an objective of the inter-branch organisations, e.g. measures to improve animal health and welfare.</p>
<p>2.2. At EU level, the reform of the common agricultural policy represents an opportunity to promote more sustainable production and healthy diets, if it makes nutritious products such as fruit, vegetables and dairy products easily available for EU citizens.</p>	<p>The Commission confirms that the legal proposals for the future common agricultural policy adopted by the Commission on 1 June 2018 aim at maximising its contribution to the achievement of the EU's international commitments, in particular the</p>

¹²⁴ Regulation (EU) 2017/2393 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2017 amending Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), (EU) No 1306/2013 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy, (EU) No 1307/2013 establishing rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within the framework of the common agricultural policy, (EU) No 1308/2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products and (EU) No 652/2014 laying down provisions for the management of expenditure relating to the food chain, animal health and animal welfare, and relating to plant health and plant reproductive material; OJ L 350, 29.12.2017, p. 15–49.

¹²⁵ Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) No 922/72, (EEC) No 234/79, (EC) No 1037/2001 and (EC) No 1234/2007; OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 671–854.

	<p>Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.</p> <p>These proposals constitute an important response to the challenges set by the above mentioned reflection paper (Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030’).</p> <p>The three dimensions of sustainability (economic, environment/climate-related, and social) are reflected in the nine specific objectives of the common agricultural policy post-2020. In particular, in order to achieve more ambitious environmental and climate-related objectives, a new ‘green architecture’ is proposed, based on three key elements: enhanced conditionality as compared to existing ‘cross compliance’ rules, new eco-schemes under Pillar I and climate-agro-environmental interventions under Pillar II of the common agricultural policy. Member States are required to plan a combination of such elements while ensuring ‘no back sliding’. Furthermore, a ring fencing of at least 30% of the rural development budget on interventions directly targeted at the environment and climate is proposed.</p> <p>The societal demands related to food and health are addressed through the ninth specific objective.</p> <p>Finally, the proposals for the future CAP maintain the school schemes for fruit and vegetables and dairy products.</p>
<p>3.2. The EESC notes that a major threat to future public health is the spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and that more effort needs to be made to cut antimicrobial use on EU farms, and to prevent importation of meats from third</p>	<p>The Commission fully agrees that it is essential to take urgent measures to efficiently fight antimicrobial resistance. In this context, and in line with the European One Health Action plan against antimicrobial resistance,</p>

<p>countries which have prophylactic antibiotic use.</p>	<p>the new Regulation (EU) 2019/6¹²⁶ on veterinary medicines and the new Regulation (EU) 2019/4¹²⁷ on medicated feed are major steps forward. They entered into force in January 2019 and will enter into application in January 2022. The new EU Regulations notably provide for a wide range of concrete measures to fight antimicrobial resistance and promote a prudent and responsible use of antimicrobials, which will apply to operators in EU Member States, including those on prophylaxis. Such measures include the completion of the 2006 ban on the use of antimicrobials in animals for promoting growth, a ban on the preventive use of antimicrobials via medicated feed, a ban on preventive use of antibiotics in groups of animals, restrictions on metaphylactic use, the possibility to reserve certain antimicrobials for humans only and compulsory data collection on sales and use of antimicrobials.</p> <p>In addition, as antimicrobial resistance has no borders, the new EU Regulation on veterinary medicines also includes a provision which lays down the obligation for third countries to respect for the animals and products of animal origin intended for export to the EU both the ban of the use of antimicrobials for growth promotion and the ban of the use of those antimicrobials which will have been designated in the EU as restricted to</p>
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¹²⁶ Regulation (EU) 2019/6 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on veterinary medicinal products and repealing Directive 2001/82/EC (Text with EEA relevance) PE/45/2018/REV/1; OJ L 4, 7.1.2019, p. 43–167.

¹²⁷ Regulation (EU) 2019/4 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the manufacture, placing on the market and use of medicated feed, amending Regulation (EC) No 183/2005 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directive 90/167/EEC (Text with EEA relevance) PE/43/2018/REV/1; OJ L 4, 7.1.2019, p. 1–23.

	<p>human use.</p> <p>Furthermore, The legislative proposals for the future common agricultural policy contain a set of indicators to be monitored, including the sales/use of antimicrobials in food producing animals. The proposals also require Member States to include training of ‘farm practices preventing the development of antimicrobial resistance’ to be a mandatory topic for the Farm Advisory Services they must provide for.</p> <p>Altogether, these measures bring a crucial improvement to consumers’ protection. They demonstrate the determination of the EU in taking substantial action against antimicrobial resistance and they position the EU as a leader in this fight on the international scene.</p>
<p>4.2. The EESC calls for a swift introduction of an EU-wide legislative limit to industrially produced trans fats in food.</p>	<p>The Commission wishes to inform that on 24 April 2019 it adopted Commission Regulation (EU) 2019/649¹²⁸ amending Annex III to Regulation (EC) No 1925/2006¹²⁹ of the European Parliament and of the Council. It limits the content of industrially produced trans fats in foods.</p>

i [OJ C 237, 6.7.2018, p. 8.](#)

ii [OJ C 62, 15.2.2019, p. 136.](#)

¹²⁸ Commission Regulation (EU) 2019/649 of 24 April 2019 amending Annex III to Regulation (EC) No 1925/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards trans-fat, other than trans-fat naturally occurring in fat of animal origin (Text with EEA relevance), C/2019/2902; OJ L 110, 25.4.2019, p. 17–20.

¹²⁹ Regulation (EC) No 1925/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the addition of vitamins and minerals and of certain other substances to foods; OJ L 404, 30.12.2006, p. 26–38.

<p>N°21 Appellations of Origin and Geographical Indications COM(2018) 365 final EESC 2018/4953 – INT/873 539th Plenary Session – December 2018 Rapporteur: Arnold PUECH D'ALISSAC (GR.I-FR) DG AGRI – Commissioner HOGAN</p>	
<p>Points of the European Economic and Social Committee opinion considered essential</p>	<p>European Commission position</p>
<p>1.5 The EESC highlights this positive trend and welcomes the European Commission's proposal to protect registered appellations of origin and registered geographical indications at international level under the Geneva Agreement and its legal practices. [...]</p>	<p>The Commission takes note and thanks the Committee.</p>
<p>1.7., 3.13. Rights accrued by GIs already registered by the seven EU countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Slovakia) which are already full members of the Lisbon Agreement and protected at European level should be preserved.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees and will give due consideration to this point in the discussion with the European Parliament and the Council.</p> <p>The transitional provisions in the Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on the action of the Union following its accession to the Geneva Act, as agreed in the trilogue with the European Parliament and the Council and Parliament on 13 March 2019, ensure that the priority of the Geographical Indications already registered by the seven European Union countries will be preserved.</p> <p>(cf. Article 11 – Transitional provisions for appellations of origin originating in Member States already registered under the Lisbon Agreement).</p>

3.9 The proposal for a positive list at EU level is not in line with the requirement to protect the geographical indications scheme as a whole.

The proposed shortlist is a policy choice, reflecting the experience from the European Union's bilateral negotiations. Submitting all EU Geographical Indications for protection upon accession would likely have a dissuasive effect on other countries joining. However, the Commission is taking due note of the Committee opinion as well as the positions of the European Parliament and the Council in this respect.

The compromise found in the trilogue with the Council and Parliament on 13 March 2019 provides that the applications for registration of European Union Geographical Indications under the Geneva Act will be based on notifications from Member States that act on their own initiative or at the request of a holder of a geographic indication. When preparing those notifications, Member States should consider the economic interest in the international protection of the geographical indications concerned and take into account, in particular, the production value and the export value, protection under other agreements, as well as current or potential misuse in third countries.