

**EN**

***European Economic and Social Committee***

Brussels, 27 November 2017

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| **PLENARY SESSION  18 AND 19 OCTOBER 2017  SUMMARY OF OPINIONS ADOPTED** |
| **This document is available in the official languages on the Committee's website at:**<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/plenary-session-summaries>**The opinions listed can be consulted online using the Committee's search engine:**<http://dm.eesc.europa.eu/EESCDocumentSearch/Pages/opinionssearch.aspx> |

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The plenary session of 18 and 19 October 2017 was attended by **Frans Timmermans**, First Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for better regulation, interinstitutional relations, the rule of law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The following opinions were adopted:

# **ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE/FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS/TAXATION**

* ***New sustainable economic models***

**Rapporteur:** Anne Chassagnette (Gr. I-FR)

**Co-rapporteur:** Carlos Trias Pintó (Various interests – ES)

**Reference:** Exploratory opinion – EESC-2017-01690-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC considers that:

* improving the coordination of action for the sustainable economy within the EU, by creating a permanent body for the new sustainable economy;
* the public authorities of the EU should support research, including responsible research and innovation;
* ensuring that the new models do in fact meet sustainability criteria;
* that the EU encourage and support education, training and information provision to improve understanding among all stakeholders of the new sustainable economic models and of the role of sustainable finance;
* the Commission analyse and complement (but not replace) private initiatives for the exchange of good practice and experience between innovators
* the public authorities of the EU ensure that the developers of new genuinely sustainable economic models have access to finance during the initial phases of development and as they continue to grow;
* the Commission encourage the trialling of new sustainable models through a dedicated innovation fund;
* that, in existing EU sectoral policies, the public authorities of the EU take account of the stakeholders developing these new economic models so as to increase their visibility and create a leverage effect that favours their deployment.

***Contact*** *Janine Borg*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 88 8879 – e-mail: [*Janine.Borg@eesc.europa.eu*](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Ctvoc%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CTemp%5Cjanine.borg%40eesc.europa.eu))

* ***Taxation of the collaborative economy***

**Rapporteur:** Giuseppe Guerini (Various Interests – IT)

**Co-rapporteur:** Krister Andersson (Employers – SV)

**Reference:** (exploratory opinion requested by the Estonian Presidency)

 EESC-2017-02946-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* believes that the collaborative economy may offer a new opportunity for growth and development for the countries of the European Union;
* underlines that given the particularly fluid and rapid nature of change in this sector, it is crucial for fiscal regulatory systems and tax regimes to be adapted in an intelligent and flexible way;
* recommends that the tax system for the collaborative economy comply with the principle of neutrality (i.e. it must not interfere with market development), identifying appropriate tax mechanisms that are fair to the different types of business operating within the collaborative economy;
* advocates the rapid construction of a uniform, integrated European system that ensures common rules for the different Member States regarding the collaborative digital economy, in the light of the natural tendency for digital networks to operate in a cross-border setting;
* calls on the European authorities to make every effort to establish channels of cooperation beyond Europe in order to lay down some ground rules for the collaborative digital economy;
* considers it important to point out that, in addition to an appropriate tax system, protection and respect must be guaranteed for: (i) consumer rights, (ii) privacy and the rules on processing personal data, and (iii) workers and service providers involved in the new business models and in the work of collaborative platforms;

## urges the Commission and the Member States to work together to adopt an overall legal framework for the collaborative economy that can coordinate and standardise the tax rules that apply to these new forms of economic activity.

***Contact***: *Jüri Soosaar*

 (Tel: 00 32 2 546 9628 - email: *juri.soosaar@eesc.europa.eu )*

* ***Euro area economic policy 2017 (additional opinion)***

**Rapporteur:** Petr Zahradník (Employers – CZ)

**Co-rapporteur:** Javier Doz Orrit (Workers – ES)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-02837-01-00-AC-TRA)

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* considers it essential to have a balanced mix of euro area economic policies, with their monetary, fiscal and structural components properly interlinked;

## disagrees with the European Council's rejection of a positive fiscal stance and calls on it to reconsider this conclusion in light of the anticipated move away from quantitative easing;

## notes the improving economic situation in the euro area and recommends that, in order to maintain and bolster this, crucial steps be taken to stimulate investment and carry out reforms;

## takes the view that the euro is the currency of the whole EU and is in favour of enlarging the euro area, with an anticipated positive impact on both the euro area and its new members;

## notes that, because of Brexit and the poor predictability of the current US administration, due attention needs to be given to political and economic developments worldwide;

## emphasises, in the context of the upcoming 2018 economic policy recommendations, the need to launch a debate on:

* creating a fiscal union;
* strengthening Member States' ownership of obligations vis-à-vis the euro area;
* the need for structural reforms within the European Semester platform;
* further strengthening of economic coordination and governance;
* reinforcing real long-term investment, in line with the SDGs, by using the EIB, EIF, EFSI 2.0;
* the euro area exerting a greater influence in the world;

## is aware of the need for increased investment to be reflected in wage trends and falling unemployment, while also addressing imbalances as an obstacle to long-term growth;

* considers that to secure the vital support of citizens for the reconstruction of the euro area and the achievement of structural reforms, the social and democratic dimensions of euro area governance need to be strengthened.

***Contact:*** *Alexander Alexandrov*

 (Tel: 00 32 2 546 9805 – e-mail: *alexander.alexandrov@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Deepening EMU by 2025***

**Rapporteur:** David Croughan (Employers – IE)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 291 final

 EESC-2017-02879-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

## The common currency and its institutions provided a stabilising element in the global financial crisis. However, the EMU is incomplete, which hampers its ability to support monetary policy and national economic policies.

## In a much more uncertain world it is important that Europeans commit to a common sense of purpose through further integration. The Committee urges the Commission and the European Council to take bold decisions before the end of this mandate to advance EU-wide governance.

## Among the most important elements for stability is the upward convergence of the heterogeneous economies. This will require national politicians and social partners to accommodate a European dimension into their deliberations about economic and fiscal policies.

## The process of the European Semester should involve the European Parliament, national parliaments, the social partners and civil society. The social dimension must be included on a par with the economic dimension.

## The EESC recognises the failings in the governance of the financial sector and fully supports the steps to complete the Financial Union, including the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union. Immediate solutions are required to tackle non-performing loans.

## The Committee supports the creation of a framework by 2018 for the introduction of sovereign-bond backed securities. In the medium-long run a European safe asset would be necessary to reduce financial market volatility and ensure the stability of the Member States’ economies.

## An own resource budget greater than 1% of GDP is called for to resource Member States in crisis and to maintain essential investment levels in the euro area. Access to such funds should be linked to progress on economic and social standards.

## There is a need for fiscal policy capable of stimulating the euro area economy in times of downturn. The MIP should be at the forefront of macroeconomic imbalance prevention, with more emphasis on the adverse euro area impact of chronic balance of payments surpluses.

* The Committee advocates the exploration of tools to improve economic governance in the EMU, for instance by creating a permanent Euro Finance Minister, while ensuring full democratic accountability. Bundling competences would enhance coherence of EMU policies.

***Contact:*** *Alexander Alexandrov*

 (Tel: 00 32 2 546 9805 – e-mail: *alexander.alexandrov@eesc.europa.eu*)

* ***EU finances by 2025***

**Rapporteur:** Stefano Palmieri (Workers – IT)

**Co-rapporteur:** Petr Zahradník (Employers – CZ)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 358 final

 EESC-2017-03447-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* would argue that Europeans need more (and better) Europe, in order to overcome the political crisis in the EU. There is a growing gap between the concerns and expectations of Europeans, and the limited powers and financial resources currently allocated to the EU;
* endorses the approach whereby the basic principle of the EU budget must be to deliver European added value, achieving better outcomes than would be possible for uncoordinated national budgets acting individually;
* finds that the EU must first identify political priorities with high European added value and only then determine the resources needed to achieve them;
* considers that it is not credible for the EU budget to continue to be less than 1% of EU-GNI;
* is of the opinion that the reform of the EU budget must of necessity aim to improve it, overhauling its structure as regards areas of expenditure and own resources, taking account of suitable rationalisation, efficiency and effectiveness criteria and maintaining direct, transparent channels of communication with the public;
* considers the following to be programmes with a high level of European added value: medium- to long-term investments in economic, social and environmental development, employment, innovation and competitiveness; protecting the most disadvantaged regions and most vulnerable social groups; and responding flexibly and promptly to asymmetric shocks and unexpected crises, including by means of an independent budget for the Eurozone;
* considers that the macroeconomic stabilisation function in the Eurozone is particularly important;
* finds that as regards revenue a new budget must be achieved which consists predominantly of autonomous, transparent and fair own resources, in line with the recommendations of the High Level Group on Own Resources;
* considers that while the impact of Brexit on the post-2020 multiannual financial framework (MFF) may be a threat for the European venture, it can also be an important opportunity.

***Contact:*** *Gerald Klec*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9909 – email:* *Gerald.Klec@eesc.europa.eu*)

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* ***Capital Markets Union: mid-term review***

**Rapporteur:** Daniel Mareels (Employers' Group – BE)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 292 final

 EESC-2017-03251-00-02-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* is strongly in favour of the CMU union and is ambitious regarding its implementation. The CMU, together with the banking union, should ensure a financial un ion, and its implementation should therefore contribute to ensuring the establishment of the EMU
* finds it absolutely necessary that the CMU becomes a reality in all EU Member States;
* calls for the political will at European level and in the Member States to make all necessary efforts and to establish all of the relevant conditions required;

## is strongly in favour of establishing a system to regularly assess the progress with and implementation of the CMU in the Member States, using both qualitative and quantitative measures, with the results of this to be made publicly available;

## welcomes the current rapid mid-term review and recommends that such exercises should in future take place on a regular basis;

## believes that further steps in building the CMU should focus on action and measures that achieve the greatest convergence;

## believes it is important to ensure that the foundations of an irrevocable and irreversible CMU are laid down as quickly as possible;

## calls for attention to be given to the financing of SMEs, for which bank financing remains an extremely important issue;

* welcomes the focus on the strengthening of sustainable investments;
* is pleased that supervision will be a key part of efforts to develop the CMU.

***Contact***: *Krisztina Perlaky-Tóth*

 (Tel: 00 32 2 546 9740 - email: *krisztina.perlakytoth@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Pan-European personal pension product – PEPP***

**Rapporteur:** Philip Von Brockdorff (Workers – MT)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 343 final

 EESC-2017-03297-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* agrees with this proposed regulation and its aim to boost investment across the EU but is unclear as to whether the investment arising from this initiative will remain within the EU and also to the impact on labour mobility across the EU arising from the provision of PEPPs;
* The EESC acknowledges that PEPPs are most likely to appeal to a limited number of groups, particularly, mobile professionals who work in a number of different Member States over their working life, and the self-employed.
* however points out that this initiative should not in any way be construed as lessening the relevance of either state or work-based pensions;
* Member States should provide fair taxation on this type of product;
* emphasises the need for consumer protection and risk mitigation for savers during the course of their working lives and on retirement. Greater clarity as to what is being guaranteed around the default option is also strongly recommended. It is of crucial importance that savers are fully aware of the risks that they bear and the conditions attached to their PEPP
* emphasises the role of EIOPA in monitoring the market and national supervisory regimes with a view to achieving convergence and consistency across the EU especially regarding the governance structure for PEPPs within any provider
* seeks clarity on the fee for changing PEPP providers, and proposes examining to waive that fee following a defined period of time.

***Contact:*** *Gerald Klec*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9909 – email:* *Gerald.Klec@eesc.europa.eu*)

# **legislation ue**

1. ***Monitoring the application of EU legislation
(Landscape review of the European Court of Auditors)***

**Rapporteurs:** Bernd Dittmann (Employers – DE)

 Ronny Lannoo (Various interests – BE)

 Denis Meynent (Workers – FR)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-04279-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC considers that:

* European legislation should always aim to create a legal framework that enables businesses and citizens to benefit from the advantages of the internal market and to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens. Monitoring of application on the ground is, therefore, essential;
* the applicability of EU law must be taken into account from the very beginning of the legislative cycle, when impact assessments are being carried out;
* better regulation is not a substitute for political decisions and must on no account lead to deregulation;
* to reduce difficulties in applying or implementing EU law, regulations should be used rather than directives;
* the Commission must consult Member States and stakeholders in order to draft legislation that they can implement easily.

***Contact:*** *Philippe Cuisson*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9961 – email:* *Gerald.Klec@eesc.europa.eu*)

# **INTERNAL MARKET**

* ***Compliance package***

**Rapporteur:** Bernardo Hernández Bataller (Various interests – ES)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 255 final

 COM(2017) 256 final – 2017/0086 (COD)

 COM(2017) 257 final – 2017/0087 (COD)

 EESC-2017-02781-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* welcomes the Commission's plans to create a culture of compliance and smart enforcement,
* supports the action plan to improve the quality and effectiveness of the SOLVIT network,
* welcomes that this portal includes access to information, procedures, effective assistance and problem-solving services, on the basis of the "only once" principle and the "whole-of-government" approach,
* hopes there will be a mandatory assessment of the functioning of the Regulation within five years,
* encourages the Member States to make more progress in the area of e-governance, particularly as regards the recognition of eID and foreign identity documents, as the services provided are not deemed to be sufficient,
* calls on the Commission to involve civil society in this process, as a means of assessing the state of the EU Single Market.

***Contact:*** *Claudia Drewes-Wran*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8067 – email:* *claudia.drewes-wran@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Report on Competition Policy 2016***

**Rapporteur:** Paulo Barros Vale (Employers – PT)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 285 final

 EESC-2017-03421-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* welcomes the Report, but believes that EU competition policy requires better definition and that it is often out of step with other EU policies that influence it;
* believes that the following issues should be subject to continual monitoring: the business practices of large retail groups which destroy smaller companies – as a result of aggressive negotiations – and limit consumer choices; unclear pricing formulas, for example in relation to energy and fuel prices, which affect businesses and consumers; and dumping practices which continue – particularly in the transport and distribution sector;
* calls on the Commission to establish genuinely effective corrective measures in the area of mergers and concentrations and to closely monitor the activities of large groups, safeguarding compliance with the rules as well as consumer and SMEs' interests.

***Contact:*** *Jana Valant*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 89 8924 – e-mail: *jana.valant@eesc.europa.eu*)

# **DIGITAL/SINGLE MARKET**

* ***European Interoperability Framework – Implementation Strategy***

**Rapporteur:** Brian Curtis (Workers – UK)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 134 final

 EESC-2017-02197-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The Committee welcomes the continuous progress and support provided by the European Commission in this further development of the European Interoperability Framework (EIF). Some earlier reservations from Member States about the EIF have now largely been resolved and although there is still some way to go the main difficulties in implementation revolve around resources and legacy issues rather than matters of principle.

The Committee nevertheless notes that interoperability capacity varies considerably between and within Member States. The current consensus is that regulation or mandatory governance procedures remain off-limits but this places a greater responsibility on Member States to voluntarily engage in every possible way with the spirit and substance of the EIF and its implementing programmes. The EESC would welcome the full engagement of the Member States and the European Union institutions to implement the EIF.

At the same time, the EESC urges Member States to take up the specific and pragmatic proposals to continue with paper or multi-channel service delivery where necessary and to allow trusted third parties to act on behalf of those who would otherwise be excluded.

Greater clarity is needed on how the requirement for a focus on the needs of business and the citizen (user-centric services) can be implemented.

Although cyber security does not fall within the competences of this Communication it is clear that reassurances need to be provided in other EU legislative instruments to ensure that greater interoperability and public access does not mean greater vulnerability by penetration from the increasing threat of cyber-attack.

***Contact:*** *Maja Radman*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9051 - e-mail: *Maja.Radman@eesc.europa.eu*)

* ***Clean, competitive and connected mobility for all***

**Rapporteur:** Ulrich Samm (Employers – DE)

**Co-rapporteur:** Brian Curtis (Workers – UK)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 283 final

 EESC-2017-03231-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The mobility agenda set out in the Commission communication reflects Europe's ambition of making rapid progress towards putting in place, by 2025, a clean, competitive and connected mobility system integrating all means of transport and spanning the entire Union.

A well-functioning Single European Transport Area depends on an adequate regulatory framework. The EESC is of the opinion that the proposed changes in legislation regarding access to the profession, market access – including cabotage – and working conditions mostly fail to effectively resolve the problems they address. The EESC underscores the urgency of finding adequate and smoothly working solutions.

Land transport technology will most likely be revolutionised by digitalisation and automation. The EESC notes that this new technology has the capacity to both improve transport market efficiencies but also to provide analytical data to assist in the control and enforcement of existing legislation and the protection of human and social rights. The EESC encourages the Commission to pursue the "Vision Zero by 2050" project further.

Furthermore, the EESC strongly supports the Commission's proposal to overcome the poor interoperability between the various existing electronic road toll systems in the Member States and implement a common interoperability framework.

The EESC notes the discrepancy between anticipated emission reduction (13%) in road transport under this package and the necessary 18-19% that the transport sector would need to contribute towards achieving the 2030 climate and energy targets. It would like to emphasise that the production of clean electricity is an indispensable condition for a successful introduction of electric vehicles (EV) into the mass market. Moreover, rebuilding trust in the automotive industry and the regulatory system by means of realistic emission standards and adequate test procedures is vital and the Committee regrets that the independent EU-wide vehicle emissions testing oversight authority proposed by the Commission was dropped.

Clear and challenging targets need to be set in Europe for clean energy-powered vehicles in order to stimulate the manufacturing sector in the areas of research, market introduction and production. The technical limitations which are still hindering a faster introduction of alternative traction systems can only be overcome by a robust research programme.

***Contact:*** *Erika Paulinova*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8457 - e-mail: *Erika.Paulinova@eesc.europa.eu*)

* ***Mid-term review/Digital single market***

**Rapporteur:** Antonio Longo (Various interests – IT)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 228 final

 EESC-2017-03200-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* supports the Commission's proposals but voices its concern at delays in the adoption and implementation of the 35 actions and legislative initiatives submitted,
* stresses the need to strengthen the social dimension of the digital single market strategy,
* hopes the EU will launch a major plan for digital education and training, providing everyone with the cognitive tools they need to cope with the transition,
* considers that social dialogue can play a key role in this process and calls on the Commission, together with the social partners, to identify robust strategies to guarantee decent wages, good jobs, a sound work-life balance and widespread access to social security,
* asks that the infrastructure and cultural digital divide be closed as soon as possible,
* reaffirms that internet access is a fundamental right for everyone and calls on the Commission to speed up implementation of the e-Government and e-health strategies,
* requests that SMEs be given more help with support for companies that includes an ad hoc strategy for start-ups,
* calls for the Commission to bolster consumer rights protection across the EU,
* considers cybersecurity a priority for European sovereignty and competitiveness.

***Contact:*** *Janine Borg*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 88 8879 – e-mail: *Janine.Borg@eesc.europa.eu*)

# **TRANSPORT**

* ***Interoperability of the electronic toll system***

**Rapporteur:** Vitas Mačiulis (Various Interests – LT)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 280 final

 EESC-2017-02887-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC strongly supports the European Commission's proposal on the interoperability of electronic road toll systems. Such road toll systems have already been introduced at national, regional or local level in 20 Member States. However, the poor interoperability of the systems at international level incurs considerable revenue losses for Member States, as well as additional costs for direct road users. The EESC encourages Member States to pursue active cross-border cooperation when developing advanced road tolling mechanisms. A lack of cooperation means that Member States have no way of identifying specific offenders if their vehicles are registered abroad.

The EESC is strongly convinced that every possible effort should be made to introduce a uniform electronic road toll system throughout the EU, based on advanced technology. Therefore the on-board unit (OBU), which is the key component in an electronic toll system, need not be a single physical device. It could be a number of physically or remotely linked devices, including smart phones and tablets, which together perform the functions of an OBU. The EESC recommends encouraging the development of special IT applications for these purposes, which would significantly reduce costs for road users.

Some Member States have already been using different road toll collection technologies, and it would be very expensive for them to transfer to a uniform system. The EESC therefore recommends that the European Commission look for flexible financial, technical and legal instruments to encourage Member States to seek to integrate the various existing solutions into one interoperable system.

The EESC supports the initiative to introduce a single contract with the European Electronic Toll Service Provider (EETS) for all EU users. This will help to implement more transparent and user-friendly practices.

Finally, the Committee considers the social aspects of the European Commission's proposal of crucial importance, due to the fact that SMEs and micro-enterprises predominate in the road haulage sector throughout the EU.

***Contact:*** *Antonio Ribeiro Pereira*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9363 - e-mail: *Antonio.RibeiroPereira@eesc.europa.eu)*

* ***Eurovignette***

**Rapporteur:** Alberto Mazzola (Employers – IT)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 275+276 final

 EESC-2017-02888-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC considers that the introduction by the EU of a fair, transparent, non-discriminatory and non-bureaucratic system of road pricing that is proportionate to road use, while complying with the "user pays" and "polluter pays" principles, would have a positive impact by combating the deterioration of road infrastructure, congestion and pollution.

As the transport sector plays a vital role in the EU's mobility and socio-economic development, the Committee is concerned that spending on road infrastructure maintenance has fallen, in spite of the new EU framework for the development of the trans-European Transport Network introduced at the end of 2013 and measures supported by the EU structural funds. In the EESC's view, it is crucial that revenues from the use of road infrastructure be allocated as follows: those relating to the use of infrastructure should go to cover the costs of building, developing, operating and maintaining road infrastructure, while those connected with external costs should be earmarked for measures to mitigate the negative effects of road transport.

The Committee sees the revision of the Eurovignette legislation as an opportunity to set common, harmonised standards and to monitor and step up the proper application of this legislation. Moreover, the EESC considers it essential that the internal transport market be free of discriminatory practices and urges the EC to take action to rapidly ensure full compliance with the EU legislative framework. In particular, the charges applied and discounts for regular and/or national users must not discriminate against occasional and/or non-national users.

The Committee considers that special attention must be given to the acceptability of measures to users, consumers and the general public in terms of the transparency and clarity of the new charging framework, ensuring that users have an immediate and clear appreciation of the purpose of the amounts collected.

Finally, the EESC is convinced that allocating revenues derived from the application of the new legislation could generate additional employment for more than half a million workers.

***Contact:*** *Antonio Ribeiro Pereira*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9363 - e-mail: *Antonio.RibeiroPereira@eesc.europa.eu)*

# **AGRICULTURE/FISHERIES**

* ***Common Fisheries Policy – Discards***

**Rapporteur:** Gabriel Sarro Iparraguirre (Various interests – ES)

**Reference:** COM (2016) 424 final

 EESC-2017-04392-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC supports the proposal to extend the powers of the European Commission to adopt discard plans by means of delegated acts for a further period of three years.

***Contact:*** *Arturo Iñiguez*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 87 68 – email: *Arturo.Iniguez@eesc.europa.eu*)

* ***Ex-post evaluations of the Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013***

**Rapporteur:** Dilyana Slavova (Various interests – BG)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-00690-00-00-RI-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC has found the rural development policy to be one of the most welcome EU policies. RDPs boosted regional development, stimulated economic growth and job creation and succeeded to transform the situation of the countryside across the EU.

A lack of coordination, complementariness and consistency with the actions of the other structural and cohesion funds (Social Fund, Regional Development Fund, etc.) in rural areas hindered the overall aim of a more balanced territorial development. Future RDPs should focus on vulnerable EU areas in order to achieve a better balance between rural and urban areas.

***Contact:*** *Arturo Iñiguez*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 87 68 – email: *Arturo.Iniguez@eesc.europa.eu*)

* ***Family and traditional businesses in regional development***

**Rapporteur:** Dimitris Dimitriadis (Employers – EL)

**Reference:** Own-initiative opinion

 EESC-2017-01106-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

## aims to have a closer look at and provide an analysis of the challenges that small family and traditional businesses (SFTBs) are facing;

## encourages the European Commission to consider ways of supporting and promoting SFTBs, as these businesses are the key element in the creation of new activities and in income generation in resource-constrained areas;

## believes that there is a lot of potential for development in many regions which are still lagging and that this underutilised potential could be realised through local SFTBs;

* calls on the Commission to pay attention to the fact that SFTBs have been negatively affected by recent economic and industrial developments and trends;

## is concerned that support policy instruments do not focus on SFTBs and it is unlikely that they will benefit significantly from them;

* welcomes the European Commission's intention to revise the definition of an SME as the current definition is already outdated;
* believes it is important that SFTBs be recognised as a specific subgroup since they typically suffer the most from market failures.

***Contact:*** *Helena Polomik*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 90 63 – email: *helena.polomik@eesc.europa.eu*)

* ***Villages and small towns as catalysts for rural development, challenges and opportunities***

**Rapporteur:** Tom Jones (Various interests – UK)

**Reference:** EESC-2016-06759-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC believes that despite the decline of balanced populations and traditional economic activity, in many villages and small towns, there is sufficient evidence of good practice to be optimistic about sustainable futures in many, if not all rural settlements. However, this optimism depends on a sustained, holistic effort involving people and financial resources at all levels of government and across all three private, public and civil sectors.

*Recommendations*

* The EESC fully supports the European Commission's Smart Villages Initiative, especially because of the promises made regarding cooperation between Directorates.
* Fast broadband is crucial for intelligently developed villages and towns to have any hope of economic and social development, and must be fully accessible, as guaranteed under the rural proofing highlighted in the Cork 2.0 Declaration of 2016.
* Public services in education, training, health an d social care, as well as child care, should be accessible, integrated and be innovative in using technological advances.
* Poor transport connectivity is another challenge and transport sharing, community-owned buses and cars are recommended where the private sector withdraws.
* Both agri- and rural tourism, health-related activities and the branding of local farm and craft products, as well as increasing the cultural and historical catalogue of events is very important. Through the enabling support of the RDP, there is scope for business entrepreneurs to attract inward investment and to develop and market added-value products.
* LEADER and Local Action Groups should be fully supported in their efforts to promote local development - by encouraging businesses, both private and not-for-profit to start and grow - and to ensure an engaged and supportive community spirit. With improved cooperation, these efforts could be expanded through Community-led Local Development (CLLD).
* The EU institutions and their stakeholders should organise an annual celebratory day, to promote successful, cohesive village and small-town communities.
* The EESC recommends that the European Investment Bank constructs tailor-made support schemes for small rural businesses, both private and social enterprises, as promised in its 2017-2019 programme.
* Youth representative bodies should be supported to create a pathway for youth forums in local communities which will galvanise action on their needs and aspirations.
* The cultural values to be found in villages and small towns should be given a prominent place in the publicity for, and initiatives during, European Cultural Heritage Year 2018.
* The Committee recommends "good practices" to be shared at all levels.

***Contact:*** *Maarit Laurila*

 *(Tel.: +32 2 546 97 9739 – e-mail:* *maarit.laurila@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Land use for sustainable food production and ecosystem services***

**Rapporteur:** Roomet Sõrmus (Various interests – EE)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-01814-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The rapporteur underlines the need to establish an EU reference framework aimed at protecting agricultural land. A joint EU soil protection strategy defining good soil status, laying down uniform terminology and harmonised criteria for monitoring, and defining priority policy measures would be of decisive importance for the sustainable use and protection of agricultural soil.

***Contact:*** *Conrad Ganslandt*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 82 75 – *Conrad.Ganslandt@eesc.europa.eu**)*

# **CREATIVE EUROPE**

* ***Regulation amending Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 establishing the Creative Europe programme (2014 to 2020)***

**Reference:** CCMI/156 – EESC-2017-04275-00-03-AC-TRA

 COM(2017) 385 final – 2017/0163 (COD)

**Key points:**

The EESC adopted its previous opinion on Regulation (EU) 1295/2013 establishing the Creative Europe programme (2014-2020) - CCMI/098-CESE 828/2012 - in March 2013.

In its previous opinion, the EESC endorsed the content of the Commission proposal. It highlighted the importance of the economic dimension of the Creative Europe programme; it also noted that the programme was overly concerned with the general objective of competitiveness, while the goal of promoting European cultural and linguistic diversity and values is less visible. It also considered the budget funding insufficient in relation to the total EU budget or the funds allocated by some Member States

In its new proposal, the Commission proposes to create a legally sound and transparent solution to ensure sustainable support for the European Union Youth Orchestra (EUYO) taking into account its specific features. The EU funding is essential to the survival of the European Union Youth Orchestra (EUYO) as a body promoting European values, diversity and young talent. It has acted as a cultural ambassador for the Union by showcasing the richness and diversity of European cultures and emerging talents.

This new proposal is in accordance with the previous Committee opinion.

This funding for the EUYO will not require additional resources from the EU budget

The new proposal adds only some words to the text of Regulation 1295/2913 establishing the Creative Europe programme (2014-2020). The proposal adds this point to Article 13(1): "(f) the European Union Youth Orchestra".

***Contact:*** *Amelia Muñoz Cabezón*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8373 – e-mail:* *Amelia.MunozCabezon@eesc.europa.eu****)***

# **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

* ***The transition towards a more sustainable European future – a strategy for 2050 (own-initiative opinion)***

**Rapporteur** Brenda King (Employers – UK)

**Co-rapporteur:** Lutz Ribbe (Various interests – DE)

**Reference:** EESC-2016-06805-00-02-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC considers that:

* Europe is facing three major issues: (1) the depletion of the earth's natural resources, including climate change and biodiversity loss; (2) social inequalities, including youth unemployment, and people left behind in regions with declining industries; and (3) public loss of trust in government, the political establishment, and the EU and its governance structures, as well as other institutions.
* These three major issues need to be understood against the background of two megatrends: digitalisation and globalisation. Whether these will have a positive or negative impact depends how they are politically managed.
* The Commission should prepare a long-term strategy for Europe's sustainable development, with the aim of fostering measures that strengthen its economy in order to realise social and environmental benefits.
* "No action" is not an option. Implementation and realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), together with the Paris Agreement, and well-managed transitions to the low carbon economy and the digital economy, will resolve the major issues facing Europe and make Europe a winner of this new industrial revolution.
* Such a strategy should be geared to the long term, and that it be explicit, horizontally and vertically integrated, manageable and participatory. Therefore the EESC considers it crucial to ensure that the transition to 2050 is designed and conducted with the full involvement of civil society representatives.

***Contact:*** *Philippe Cuisson*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9961 – email:* *Gerald.Klec@eesc.europa.eu*)

# **ENVIRONMENT**

* ***Emissions/heavy duty vehicles***

**Rapporteur:** Dirk Bergrath (Workers – DE)

Co-rapporteur: Mihai Manoliu (Employers – RO)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 279 final – 2017/0111 (COD)

 EESC-2017-03111-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* believes that the transport sector needs to make its contribution to reducing emissions, along with construction, agriculture and waste, and therefore welcomes the proposal,
* welcomes the choice of the third option of combined reporting, as this safeguards the digital flow of information, means that data are collected at both national and EU level,
* recommends the Commission to strike a balance between targets that can be achieved in the short to medium-term and the longer-term goal of zero-emission road transport.
* feels that the recommendations of its opinion on CARS 21 High Level Group could also be applied for heavy-duty vehicles, especially for the time frame for implementation,
* underlines the role of public investment and regulation in reducing road transport emissions, including those produced by heavy goods transport,
* stresses that any regulatory action must go hand in hand with more policy measures to reduce demand for road transport – including for heavy goods transport – by shifting to other modes (rail, inland waterways, etc.) that produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

***Contact:*** *Claudia Drewes-Wran*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8067 – email:* *claudia.drewes-wran@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Climate justice***

**Rapporteur:** Cillian Lohan (Various interests – IE)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-01144-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

Climate Justice is typically viewed in a global context of spatial and temporal interdependence and recognises that the most vulnerable and poorest in society often suffer the greatest impact of the effects of climate change, despite these people being the least responsible for the emissions that have driven the climate crisis. Climate Justice recognises the need to consider the fairness of the often disproportionate impact of climate change on citizens and communities.

The EESC believes that citizens have a right to a healthy, clean environment, and to expect governments to take action on the drivers and threats of climate change.

The EESC calls for a drafting of an EU Bill of Climate Rights to encapsulate the rights of EU citizens and nature in the context of the challenges of climate change and encourages EU institutions and National Governments to examine the application of the principles of Climate Justice at all levels. The EESC recalls two recent initiatives: the Global Pact for the Environment and project of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Humankind that support this opinion.

Production and consumption systems must change to adapt to and to mitigate climate change. Sustainable food consumption must start at the upstream stage of soil preparation and management of natural systems in order to provide the primary building blocks for food, thus the EESC highlights the need for a Soil Framework Directive.

Consumers need sustainable ethical alternatives that will not reduce the convenience or quality of services or their accessibility. New economic models such as the Digital, Collaborative, and Circular Economy offer alternatives, but public investments are also required to ensure that infrastructure and appropriate supports exist to enable consumers to choose a low carbon lifestyle, including assistance for meeting the higher costs of ethical and sustainable goods and services.

Mapping the displacement of jobs in a low carbon economy is also required, with opportunities identified to allow effective policies to be designed and implemented, ensuring worker protection.

The EESC repeats its call for a European Energy Poverty Observatory[[1]](#footnote-2) to bring together concerned stakeholders and define European energy poverty indicators, and to ensure that clean, affordable and accessible energy is available to everyone.

The EESC calls for an end to fossil fuel subsidies and a shift to renewables in order to support the transition.

***Contact:*** *Noelani Dubeta*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 9786 – e-mail: *Noelani.Dubeta@eesc.europa.eu*)

# **EDUCATION**

* ***New EU education strategy***

**Rapporteur:** Pavel Trantina (Various interests – CZ)

**Co-rapporteur:** Antonello Pezzini (Employers – IT)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-03627-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* welcomes the initiatives and agrees with their principles;
* calls on the Commission and the Member States to include the need to value cultural diversity and tolerance in education policies as another area for fostering active citizenship and promoting EU fundamental values;
* believes that we are all responsible for educating people and making them truly aware of common European history and values, yet it maintains that a more ambitious initiative is needed, one that would lead to a more holistic education strategy that changes the current paradigm;
* considers that further support and training needs to be provided not only to teachers and school heads but also to the real-life educators, such as parents, the community and non-formal education providers;
* considers essential the availability of sufficient, equitably allocated funding and a coordinated governance in the framework of high-quality and effective social dialogue;
* regrets that adults are barely mentioned, while higher education can play a key role in lifelong learning at all ages, and can also help update the skills, competences and knowledge of employed and unemployed people;
* emphasises that educational resources should not only focus on performance, but also on inclusiveness, for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and for refugees;
* highlights the importance of involving the social partners and other civil society organisations effectively in the process;
* is of the opinion that cooperation and links between formal, non-formal and informal learning and the validation of their outcomes must also be addressed;
* stresses the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to entrepreneurship;
* believes that the wider purpose of education lies within the balance and close cooperation between the STEM subjects and the social sciences and humanities;
* is of the opinion that given both the opportunities and the dangers linked to the use of ICT, ICT should form an integral part of lifelong learning;
* encourages the Member States to take a significant step forward and establish – including through the use of effective social and civil dialogues – the education, training and lifelong learning systems that will provide learners with a promising future in Europe.

***Contact:*** *Natalia Agapiou*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 9627 – e-mail: *Noelani.Dubeta@eesc.europa.eu*)

# **SOCIAL AFFAIRS/CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS**

* ***Financing of CSOs by the EU***

**Rapporteur:** Jean-Marc Roirant (Various interests – FR)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-01953-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

## considers that the European institutions should promote a positive image of CSOs, which are vital to involving the public and encouraging them to express their views.

## considers that the European institutions should take steps to establish genuine European civil society dialogue on the basis of a commitment agreement with civil society. Discussions must be resumed on a statute for European associations and a statute for European foundations, and Article 11 of the TEU on structured dialogue with civil society must be implemented;

* calls for a strategy facilitating the development of a strong and independent civil society in Europe and for the establishment of an EU Ombudsman on civic space freedoms to whom NGOs would report incidents related to any harassment or restriction of their work.
* calls on the budget authorities to increase funding for CSOs, including in the form of operating grants and multiannual financing, and to ensure that voluntary work is properly valued in the new financial regulation.
* calls on the Commission to propose a European fund for democracy, human rights and values within the EU, to be equipped with an ambitious budget, directly open to CSOs and managed independently, similarly to the European Endowment for Democracy;
* believes that the Europe for Citizens programme should be endowed with a budget of EUR 500 million. Similarly, Erasmus+ actions targeting civil society should be increased;
* calls for further involvement of civil society organisations in the future research framework programme.
* calls on the European Commission to react promptly when national administrative or legal provisions restrict the access of national civil society organisations to EU funds.

***Contact:*** June Bedaton

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8134 – email:* *june.bedaton@eesc.europa.eu*

* ***Impact of the social dimension and the European Pillar of Social Rights on the Future of the European Union***

**Rapporteur** Gabriele Bischoff (Workers – DE)

**Co-rapporteur:** Jukka Ahtela (Employers – FI)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-02692-00-02-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

Faced with challenges such as the future of work, rising inequalities and poverty, globalisation and migration, the debate on the social dimension of Europe and the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) could be instrumental to reaching a new consensus. Which scenario or pathway is chosen will fundamentally impact on people's lives. Delivering on balanced economic growth and social progress leading to improved living and working conditions should be the guiding principle.

The Council should support the Proclamation of the EPSR. A clear road map for its implementation is advisable. Deepening the social dimension is better done with all Member States, focusing on key projects, but should not prevent some countries going ahead and inviting all others to follow. More clarity is needed on which measures should apply to the EU-27 or the Eurozone.

Growing inequality, poverty and social exclusion call for further efforts aimed at defining common principles, standards, policies and strategies on better convergence of wages, establishing or increasing minimum wages, minimum income for all, and the increase of social cohesion and social investment.

It will be important to reach a consensus on who should do what in the area of social policy, coupled with more transparency and accountability including for the failure to act. Reforms and political initiatives have to make societies and economies fit for the future.

All relevant representative civil society organisations have to be duly involved, while recognising the specific role of social partners. Promoting collective bargaining and social dialogue at all levels will be important in providing well-functioning labour markets, fair working conditions, increased productivity and sustainable social security.

The lack of enforcement of existing social rights is concerning and the Commission and Member States must improve compliance with EU rules.

The discussion on the social dimension of Europe is connected to the debates on deepening EMU, how to harness globalisation while addressing its challenges and how these objectives will be adequately and effectively resourced.

Action is especially needed in two main areas –EMU and the single market. Social policy has to be embedded in a different EU economic policy with a good macroeconomic policy mix and progress towards deepening EMU. The European Semester will play a key role in rebalancing economic and social policy as well as facilitating well-designed reforms. The Pillar is also intended to impact on European economic governance. The Social Scoreboard for the EPSR needs to be improved with more adequate and suitable indicators.

A stronger EU can help to better shape globalisation and digitalisation to the benefit of all while aware of the possibilities and risks.

***Contact:*** *June Bedaton*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8134 – email:* *june.bedaton@eesc.europa.eu*

* ***European Solidarity Corps (ESC)***

**Rapporteur:** Pavel Trantina (Various interests – CZ)

**Co-rapporteur:** Antonello Pezzini (Employers – IT)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-03055-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* welcomes the European Commission's proposal, recognising it as a good start for a broader discussion, but with a lot of elements to clarify and improve;
* is satisfied that some of the priorities that were highlighted by the civil society organisations in the various stakeholder consultations organised by the Commission were included in the legal basis;
* considers that the added value of the ESC projects lies in the fact that they seek to establish among participants and the communities hosting them a full awareness of European citizenship and a sense of belonging to one Union;
* asks for more "fresh money" to be invested in the programme;
* is very concerned about the merging of the ESC goals with those of youth employment policies; it therefore suggests that the inclusion of job and traineeship placements in the programme should be reconsidered;
* is of the opinions that placements should be limited to non-profit organisations, foundations and social enterprises;
* has come up with the following suggestions for improving the draft legal basis:
* the definition of volunteering and solidarity actions should be changed;
* online platforms must become a genuinely effective interactive and management tool;
* more support and preparation should be provided for young people, including the disadvantaged, before their placement and youth organisations should be supported in providing such preparation;
* youth organisations and social partners must be involved in the co-management of the ESC;
* accessibility must be enhanced, administrative burdens lowered and the approach of national agencies changed so as to make them more user-friendly.

***Contact:*** *Natalia Agapiou*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 9627 – e-mail: *Noelani.Dubeta@eesc.europa.eu*)

# **EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

* ***Exchanging and protecting personal data in a globalised world (communication)***

**Rapporteur:** Cristian Pîrvulescu (Various interests – RO)

**Opinions** EESC-2017-03365-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The opinion responds to a referral by the European Commission on the Communication on "Exchanging and protecting personal data in a globalised world". The Communication presents the different tools to exchange personal data internationally, based on the reformed data protection rules, as well as its strategy for engaging with selected third countries in the future to reach adequacy decisions and promoting data protection standards through multilateral instruments.

The opinion stresses that the EU has a responsibility to become a global actor in promoting respect for fundamental rights and adequate protection of private life and personal data and encourages the European Commission to be pro-active at bilateral and multilateral level in promoting the highest standard of personal data protection.

In this sense, the EESC finds well-balanced and reasonable the four key criteria outlined in the Communication to be taken into account by the Commission when assessing the countries with which a dialogue on adequacy should be pursued. However, it finds important to interpret these criteria in the light of a real commitment on the part of the governments, parliaments, and courts in these countries to reach an equivalent and functional level of personal data protection and calls for more transparency and civil society participation in the process of granting adequacy decisions.

It also recalls the importance of the proposals put forward in the European Parliament Resolution of 6 April 2017 on the adequacy of the protection afforded by the EU-US Privacy Shield which raises serious concerns, many of them indicating that the agreement and the current US legislative framework do not in practice protect the rights of EU citizens.

The opinion highlights that, given the rapid technological advances and continuous expansion of ITC infrastructure, there is a need for close governmental oversight and monitoring. In this sense, it recommends a permanent contact between the Commission, data protection authorities (DPAs) and third country governmental authorities to identify new challenges in what is a very dynamic technological and economic environment.

Regarding multilateral efforts, the EESC considers that:

* Promoting data protection standards through multilateral instruments should be a priority for the European Commission and that this commitment should be backed by resources, so that a real protection of human rights can be achieved a priori and, a posteriori, an effective legal remedy for prejudices.
* The only binding multilateral instrument in the area of data protection is the Council of Europe Convention No 108 of 1981, with its additional Protocol of 1999 and it should be further developed and more third countries should be encouraged to join.
* Multilateral efforts within the OECD, the G20 and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) should be further developed with a view to building a truly global multilateral system of data protection. Cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy should be solid and functional.

Finally, concerning personal data exchanges as part of the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of criminal offences, the opinion strongly supports the creation of robust data protection safeguards and is also open to the introduction of adequacy findings in the criminal law enforcement sector.

***Contact:*** *Lucia Mendez Del Rio*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9345 – email:* *june.bedaton@eesc.europa.eu*

* ***EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement – Trade and Sustainable Development Chapter***

**Rapporteur:** Dumitru Fornea (Workers – RO)

**Opinions** EESC-2017-02894-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The EESC recognises that overall the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the EU and Korea has produced encouraging economic and social results. However, the implementation of the sustainable development aspects of the FTA, particularly labour issues, remains unsatisfactory. The Committee reiterates the positions taken by the EU Domestic Advisory Group (DAG), notably that the European Commission should open consultations with the Korean Government about the implementation of its commitments on freedom of association and collective bargaining.

The civil society mechanisms in the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter of the EU-Korea FTA have been strengthened continuously over the last five years. Given the increasing number of EU trade agreements entering into force and the consequent increase in the number of civil society monitoring mechanisms in place, the Commission must now urgently ensure that the necessary funds are made available so as to enable those mechanisms to operate effectively.

In order to ensure the effective implementation of the TSD chapter, the EESC considers it paramount that the Parties take into consideration and follow-up the civil society recommendations provided by the DAGs and the CSF.

The EESC underlines the importance of continuing to raise awareness among European businesses, particularly SMEs, regarding the opportunities offered by this FTA.

The EU-Korea FTA has been very important for the agri-food sector, and the Commission should do more for a simplified access of the European agricultural and food products on the Korean market.

The Committee underlines the importance of the consultative mechanisms established by the EU-Korea FTA as effective and representative tools that can support the European institutions in their actions related to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, and to strengthen international cooperation on sustainable development, environmental protection and climate change.

***Contact:*** *Gunilla Fevre-Burdy*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9108 - e-mail: *Gunilla.Sandberg@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***EU development partnerships and the challenge posed by international tax agreements***

**Rapporteur:** Alfred Gajdosik (Various interests – AT)

**Co-rapporteur:** Thomas Wagnsonner (Workers – AT)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-00804-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) supports a development policy that sees development as a process carried out between countries on equal terms, based on respect and sovereign decisions. Financing and implementing sustainable development goals (SDGs) agreed at United Nations (UN) level requires globally coordinated efforts. The EESC would point out that the UN's Economic and Social Council could play an even stronger role as a suitable forum for dealing with tax matters. This would ensure both the gearing of Agenda 2030 to the SDGs and the participation of all countries on an equal footing.

The EESC warmly welcomes the fact that the European Union (EU) and its Member States have made considerable efforts in the context of international reform to address the weaknesses of the international tax system. These efforts are welcome and need to be supported and implemented effectively and then subject to regular monitoring.

The EESC calls for coherence to be ensured between Member States' international taxation policies and the objectives of development policies, so as to avoid conflicts between individual countries' taxation policies and joint development priorities.

The EESC has been supportive of private investment fostering development, when such development is in line with the SDGs and when basic economic, environmental and social rights, core International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions and the Decent Work Agenda are upheld.

The EU and its Member States, in the New European Consensus on Development, have committed themselves to cooperating with partner countries in making progressive taxation, anti-corruption measures and redistributive policies more widespread, as well as combating illicit financial flows. Taxation policy should, however, be a more important element of European development policy. The EESC welcomes the European Commission's commitment to regional forums and civil society organisations operating in the area of taxation in developing countries. Civil society organisations in these countries have a monitoring and supporting role to play, including in tax matters, and should therefore be more involved and be given more support. Support for appropriate tax capacity-building measures, including peer learning and South-South cooperation, would have a lasting impact on development projects.

The EESC recommends that good tax governance clauses be enshrined in all relevant agreements between the EU and third countries and regions in order to promote sustainable development.

The EESC recommends that, when new and revised free trade agreements are being concluded between the EU and developing countries, the opportunity be taken to analyse bilateral tax agreements as well.

***Contact:*** *Else Boonstra*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8290 - e-mail: *Gunilla.Sandberg@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Economic, social and cultural rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region***

**Rapporteur** Helena De Felipe Lehtonen (Employers – ES)

**Opinions** EESC-2017-02357-00-02-AC-TRA

**Key points:**

The topic of Economic, social and cultural rights in an Euro-Mediterranean region facing massive challenges is a vast and complex one. Conscious of this fact, the rapporteur focuses on 8 main topics.

The importance for civil society to have an institutionalized consultative role and, where institution such as ESCs exist, the importance to support them and, where they don't exist, to work in order to create a space for civil society to have a voice in the political process.

Women are victims of gender stereotypes which reproduce political, economic and educational barriers with serious consequences for society’s development. Moreover, in order to strengthen rights, the EESC recommends involving local authorities in the various activities carried out by organisations, economic and social actors, civil society and their gender equality networks.

The EESC urges the European Commission and the member states of the Union for the Mediterranean to promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue, cultural heritage, artistic expression and creative industries as culture is a driver in addressing the multiple causes of the threat of violent extremism.

The EESC underlines that economic, labour and social rights are essential for economic development and a democratic society. These rights include free enterprise, freedom of association and of industrial action, collective bargaining, and social protection in areas such as health, education and old age.

In the view of education as one of the main vehicle for social and economic development, and the fact that unequal educational opportunities put the region’s stability and security at risk, the EESC calls for joint efforts to improve the quality of primary and secondary education, higher education and vocational training through the exchange of experience on curriculum development and innovative methodology.

The EESC considers it essential to close the knowledge gap between the two shores of the Mediterranean and, to this end, proposes the promotion of joint knowledge and research networks to facilitate the transfer and circulation of knowledge and the mobility of teachers, students, academics and researchers as well as support for the translation of their work, especially from and into Arabic

Non-formal education is a vital additional element given the valuable role it plays in shaping more inclusive and pluralistic societies. The EESC believes that the synergies between formal and non-formal education should be stepped up.

Support is needed for the digital and technological integration of people. To this end, the EESC underlines the need to promote local and regional projects that empower citizens with regards to the use of new technologies, entrepreneurship and digitalisation, together with the need to strengthen initiatives aimed at citizen participation, promotion of digital training and the creation of decent jobs.

***Contact:*** *Georges-Henry Carrard*

 (Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9593 - e-mail: *Gunilla.Sandberg@eesc.europa.eu**)*

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1. [OJ C 341, 21.11.2013, p. 21](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:341:SOM:EN:HTML). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)