

**EN**

***European Economic and Social Committee***

Brussels, 18 June 2018

|  |
| --- |
| **PLENARY SESSION  23 AND 24 MAY 2018  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> |

**Contents:**

[1. **Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion** 3](#_Toc515616278)

[2. **Single Market, Production and Consumption** 4](#_Toc515616279)

[3. **Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society** 6](#_Toc515616280)

[4. **External Relations** 7](#_Toc515616281)

[5. **Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment** 9](#_Toc515616282)

[6. **Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship** 14](#_Toc515616283)

The following opinions were adopted in the plenary session of 23 May 2018:

# **Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion**

* ***VAT reform package (II)***

**Rapporteur:** Petru Sorin DANDEA (Workers' Group - RO)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 20 final - 2018/0005(CNS)

 COM(2018) 21 final - 2018/0006(CNS)

 COM(2018) 783 final - 2017/0248(CNS)

 COM(2018) 706 final - 2017/0349(CNS)

EESC-2017-05457-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the Commission's proposals and recommends that they be swiftly adopted and implemented by the Member States given the fact that the excessive fragmentation of the VAT system within the internal market places unjustified obstacles in the way of small businesses' development;
* endorses the Commission's objective of ensuring that the measures included in this package are for the benefit of the final consumer and points out that the "negative list" should not unduly curb Member States' freedom to establish reduced rates for certain general-interest goods;
* would draw the Member States' attention to key aspects of the VAT system as applied to organisations and associations providing assistance to disadvantaged people. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the EU institutions and the Member States exempt these organisations from the VAT regime;
* agrees with the Commission's proposal to allow Member States to use two reduced rates of a minimum of 5%, as well as one reduced rate lower than 5%, and considers that they should be applied to certain classes of goods and services, as is the case in some Member States. It recommends that the Member States continue to apply reduced rates to certain classes of goods and services of general interest;
* recommends that the Member States provide the institutions responsible for combating VAT fraud with the human, financial and logistical resources they need, in order to ensure proper implementation of the provisions of the regulation, as proposed by the Commission;
* believes that the ambitious objectives set by the Commission in this legislative package can only be achieved if the Member States make the necessary efforts to adopt the definitive VAT system within a reasonable period of time.

***Contact***: *Jüri Soosaar*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 96 28 – email:* *juri.soosaar@eesc.europa.eu**)*

# **Single Market, Production and Consumption**

* ***Social economy enterprises/migrants***

**Rapporteur:** Giuseppe GUERINI (Diversity Europe – IT)

**Reference:** EESC-2017-04769-00-00-AC-TRA

 Own-initiative opinion

**Key points**

The EESC:

* is of the view that social economy enterprises have a fundamental role and are active in four key aspects of the migrant integration process: health and assistance; housing; training and education; and work and the active inclusion of migrants in the societies hosting them;
* believes that social economy enterprises can encourage and support not just the creation of new jobs, but also entrepreneurship and access to economic activities for migrants and refugees.
* asks the European institutions to prioritise policies geared towards social economy enterprises, a request it also made in its contribution to the Commission's 2018 work programme.

***Contact***: *Marie-Laurence Drillon*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 83 20 – e-mail:* *marie-laurence.drillon@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Goods package***

**Rapporteur:** Jorge PEGADO LIZ (Diversity Europe – PT)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 787 final

 COM(2017) 795 final – 2017/353 (COD)

 COM(2017) 796 final – 2017/354 (COD)

 EESC-2018-00201-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the complex work that the Commission has put into producing this package, but considers that the present proposal should include a rule tightening up on the market surveillance obligation on the part of Member States, including the obligation to report to the Commission (on a quarterly basis) on their activities and controls;
* would again insist that the general principles governing market surveillance should include the precautionary principle as a key element of decisions in all cases;
* considers it a matter of priority not only for the European Commission to be required to present regular reports on RAPEX, but for consumers and businesses, as well as the organisations representing them, to have access to additional information to that which is made publicly available;
* highlights the need to reinforce the common European customs strategy to ensure the optimum use of physical and human resources in developing the measures set out in the present proposal and, to this end, recommends stepping up mutual assistance agreements with all trade partners;
* believes that the issue of market surveillance of sales via online platforms, as well as the assessment of new risks for consumers using devices connected to the internet (“Internet-connected devices”) should be included in this proposal.

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

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 89 24 – e-mail:* *jana.valant@eesc.europa.eu**)*

1. ***Health technology assessment***

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

**Reference:** COM(2018) 051 final – 2018/0018 (COD)

 EESC-2018-00626-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* agrees that the aim of sustainable cooperation on health technology assessment (HTA) at EU level is to ensure that all the EU countries can benefit from efficiency gains, thus maximising added value;
* believes that the proposal should benefit SMEs, as well as social enterprises operating in the sector, by reducing the current administrative burden and compliance costs linked to submissions of multiple dossiers to meet different national HTA requirements;
* recommends that the regulation mention preventive measures such as support for hospitals in monitoring nosocomial infections and in their prevention, reduction and elimination, and that the scope of the regulation should be broadened to include such measures.

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

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 89 24 – e-mail:* *jana.valant@eesc.europa.eu**)*

# **Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society**

* ***High Performance Computing***

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

**Co-rapporteur**: Antonio LONGO (Diversity Europe – IT)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 8 final - 2018/0003(NLE)

 EESC-2018-00354-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* endorses this initiative for a EuroHPC Joint Undertaking as a concrete step in line with the European cloud strategy as well as part of a wider EU strategy (which includes Cybersecurity, the Digital Single Market, the European Gigabit Society, Open Science, etc.). This initiative brings clear EU added value with a key technology which will help to tackle the most challenging issues of our modern society and will ultimately be beneficial for our well-being, competitiveness and jobs;
* considers the starting investment of EUR 1 billion for the acquisition and operation of world-class supercomputing machines as significant but not too ambitious compared to its competitors the USA and China. However, the EESC is convinced that a substantial increase in the investments (in EU Member States) combined with a strong European research and innovation programme will be necessary to maintain a world class level in HPC applications. As the race will continue, there is no doubt that similar efforts will be necessary for the next MFF in line with the global competitors' ones;
* endorses the industrial approach for developing the next generation of low-power microchips in Europe. This would make the EU less dependent on imports and secure access to top HPC technology. The EESC points out that the development of such microchips also has an impact on small-scale computing because the high-end integrated circuits can be adapted (downscaling) to appliances in the mass market (PCs, smartphones, automotive sector).

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

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

# **External Relations**

* ***EU-Mercosur Association Agreement***

**Rapporteur:** Josep PUXEU ROCAMORA (Employers – ES)

**Co-rapporteur:** Mário SOARES (Diversity Europe – PT)

**Reference:** EESC-2018-01010-00-00-AC-TRA
 Own-initiative opinion

**Key points**

* The EESC believes that an agreement of this nature will only be possible if it is balanced, beneficial to both parties in the medium and long-term and does not sacrifice any particular sector (such as farming or industry), region or country. Under no circumstances can the AA be based on a poor deal.
* Taking into account all aspects of cooperation and political dialogue (two of the three essential pillars of the AA), the EESC calls on the negotiating parties to show the utmost political will, which is essential to concluding the agreement and to make the greatest possible effort to overcome the differences currently affecting trade-related matters, by recognising the sensitive aspects in some sectors included in the negotiation and to this end using the recognition of disparities, monitoring of the points agreed, flanking and countervailing measures, the establishment of exceptions, development plans to support the worst affected sectors, the promotion of investments, innovation policies and countervailing, transitional and future-developments clauses. Furthermore, all EU policies should be included in the flanking measures, as well as in others.
* For the EESC, the profound digital transformation taking place on both sides of the Atlantic could provide greater impetus to harness the potential of an AA signed between the EU and Mercosur. One of the sectors that could be positively affected is the global value chains between EU and Mercosur, which are currently very weak, and could be strengthened. The AA would also be relevant to all matters relating to building infrastructure, particularly interconnections and the development of sustainable energy and most notably, the telecommunications sector.
* The EESC calls upon the negotiating parties, and the EU in particular, to consider the high political and economic cost of not reaching an agreement or an agreement that is not well-balanced for both parties and the missed opportunity that this would represent. Clearly, it is not only the Mercosur countries that should be taken into account when calculating the cost of not reaching an agreement, the whole of Latin America and in particular the countries of the Pacific Alliance, which have become a main focus for Europe's attention in the Latin American integration process, should also be included.
* The EESC is of the view that the AA should be ambitious and deal with all aspects of EU-Mercosur relations. The recent free trade agreements signed with Canada and Japan should be taken into consideration. In this regard, it is important to tackle the real barriers that companies face, by harmonising the rules and their impact on non-trade barriers.
* The AA should have a fully comprehensive social, labour and environmental dimension. This dimension should ensure that economic relations are in line with the social and environmental objectives of the agreement, without undermining the rules and guarantees governing sustainable development. The importance of food security should also be emphasised.
* The EESC believes that the AA should be used as an active tool to promote social dialogue and compliance with fundamental ILO conventions, particularly those related to decent work and included in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work of 1998. In this regard, the EESC calls for an enhanced socio-occupational chapter to address problems in the world of work and to promote dialogue between employers and employees, which could provide a boost for greater social cohesion.
* The Committee also calls for the creation of a civil society Joint Monitoring Committee made up of the EESC and Mercosur's Economic and Social Consultation Forum . It shall:
* have advisory status,
* a balanced membership that ensures equal representation of the three sectors represented at both institutions,
* have a voice on all areas covered by the AA (including, therefore, its chapter on trade and sustainable development),
* have a recognised right to direct dialogue with other joint bodies of the AA recognised and
* be consulted by these bodies and able to act on its own initiative, draw up its own rules of procedure and receive adequate funding from the respective political authorities in order to enable it to carry out its duties.
* The EESC considers it unnecessary and inefficient to include civil society representation twice once in the general AA and again in the chapter on Trade and Sustainable Development. The Committee therefore considers the AA as a whole which applies to all countries of both parties. The EESC urges the negotiators to learn from the experience of other association agreements, which have set up domestic advisory groups (DAGs) for each party without including any possibility for recognised dialogue under the agreements. The clear limitations of this model show that it makes no sense for each Mercosur country to have a DAG involving civil society indirectly in the AA. This is particularly true since both parties have independent, balanced, representative advisory bodies that are capable of exercising their mandate under the AA.

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

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9345 - e-mail:* *Lucia.MendezDelRioCabra@eesc.europa.eu**)*

# **Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment**

1. ***The interface between chemicals, products and waste legislation***

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

**Reference:** COM(2018) 32 final

 EESC-2018-00491-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

* The Committee welcomes the approach taken by the Commission in exploring systematically the relevant range of options which could help resolve a series of problems identified at the interface between chemical, product and waste legislation.
* The pro-active, long-term view of the type being adopted by the Commission on this matter is commended. The transition process will, inevitably, be of extended duration, but will require constant encouragement to be driven forward and need to take account of ongoing developments in identification and processing technology.
* The occupational health and safety of workers in recycling plants are also at risk without comprehensive action, particularly on dealing with the issue of legacy substances. The provision of comprehensive information to trade unions is therefore essential.
* The full application of the REACH Regulation and other legislation on chemicals already in place should be prioritised. Existing legislation which prevents hazardous chemicals from initial entry to the material cycle is still not being fully used, especially concerning entry into the EU on products from third countries.
* The Committee identifies and advocates further investment in adapted sorting equipment by recycling companies and the consideration of economic and technical support measures in this area.
* The Committee strongly supports the view that better information on the presence, location, and concentration of hazardous chemicals in products and materials recovered from waste can reduce problems encountered by operators in the recovery chain.

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

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

1. ***Strategy for plastics in a circular economy (including the processing of waste from ship)***

**Rapporteur:** Antonello Pezzini (Employers – IT)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 28 final

 COM(2018) 33 - final – 2018-12-COD

 EESC-2018-00536-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

* The EESC has supported the Commission's policy on the circular economy from the outset, but feels that it should be pursued in close collaboration with the social partners and civil society organisations by means of forward planning exercises, and with the involvement of institutions of higher education and the various training centres.

### The EESC considers that for both economic and health and safety reasons, an industry strategy geared towards reuse must be developed, particularly in the now vast packaging industry. This strategy should involve businesses with experience in recycling processes and should aim to harmonise and engineer skills, both upstream and downstream. In particular, acting in close cooperation with European and international bodies, national standardisation bodies should step up the process of using labelling to recognise secondary raw materials. European standardisation here will improve consumer safety when it comes to new products.

### The EESC feels that research and innovation should play a key role, particularly the Joint Technology Initiative on Institutional public-private partnerships under Horizon 2020 focusing on developing bio-based products and other initiatives promoting a circular and sustainable approach under the next Framework Programme 9.

### Priority must be given to the process of digitally labelling the various types of plastics for the purpose of identification, separation and possibly elimination using common methodologies. It is particularly important to ensure that these secondary raw materials contain none of the toxic substances which appear in raw materials not intended for use with food or in children's toys. In particular, the EESC considers that action must be taken by means of chemical analyses conducted under the REACH programme to curb microplastic pollution, one of the biggest dangers to the environment and human health.

### The EESC firmly supports the Commission's proposals to equip ports with facilities for the collection of waste and the requirements imposed on ship owners to comply with waste disposal procedures. A similar policy should also be applied to rivers, which collect much of the pollution in the seas. The EESC considers that fishing associations and the social partners should be involved, both culturally and through national and/or European funds, in cleaning up polymer residue from seas and rivers and in raising awareness about river and marine waste. When properly trained, they could also participate in the part of the industry active in ports and along the rivers during the initial stages of recycling, particularly when the fishing season is closed to allow fish to reproduce.

***Contact:*** *Monica Guarinoni*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 81 27– email:* *Monica.Guarinoni@eesc.europa.eu* *)*

1. ***The future of food and farming***

**Rapporteur:** Jarmila Dubravská (Employers – SK)

**Co-rapporteur:** John Bryan (Diversity Europe – IE)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 713 - final

 EESC-2018-00162-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

* The future CAP must meet the original objectives set down in the Treaty of Rome as well as new objectives around the environment, climate change and biodiversity, while at the same time ensuring that the European model of agriculture is maintained and remains competitive and viable, to meet the needs of European citizens. The new CAP must also adopt and deliver on the targets set down in the UN Sustainable Development Goals and COP21.
* The EESC welcomes the direction of the reforms and the new proposals on subsidiarity and the new delivery model, and highlights the need to ensure that they are implemented in a way that protects the common policy and single market and is in line with the commitments on simplification. However, the EESC believes that the communication should have been more specific. The Committee hoped the Commission would take into account the view of civil society set out in this opinion in the forthcoming legislative proposals. The timeline for the EESC's opinion and EC's legislative proposals was too tight.
* The EESC supports the CAP two-pillar model, with the first pillar providing direct payments, which should be reoriented and which must ensure a fair income for farmers and an incentive for the delivery of public goods, as well as market support, and the second pillar supporting rural areas and fighting depopulation in line with the Cork 2.0 declaration. The EESC is opposed to co-financing of the first pillar. It calls for a reasonable level of co-financing of the second pillar for all Member States. The EESC is clear that direct payments should only go to active farmers, based on objective criteria relating to agricultural activities and the provision of public goods.
* The EESC supports a strong, well-funded CAP and an increase in the EU budget to 1.3% of GNI in line with the growth in the EU economy. Adequate CAP funding must be provided to address low incomes of farmers and agricultural workers, inflation and any Brexit shortfall, as well as additional environmental and climate change requirements, and to address the need for approximation of direct payments between Member States taking into consideration differences in conditions.
* The EESC believes the CAP must support the small and the large, the young and the old, the new and the established, self-employed farmers and their employees, women as well as men, in such a way as to make life in the countryside viable for active farmers involved in agricultural production, delivering public goods, taking care of the environment and contributing to employment.

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

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 39 email:* *Maarit.Laurila@eesc.europa.eu**)*

 *Arturo Iniguez*

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

* ***Actions to improve environmental compliance and governance***

**Rapporteur:** Arnaud Schwartz (Diversity Europe – FR)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 10 final

 EESC-2018-00505-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

## The EESC welcomes the Communication in question, yet with some reservations. It feels that the European Commission's action plan to improve compliance with environmental legislation and environmental governance is severely lacking in both ambition and resources, given the current level of environmental degradation.

## The EESC is all the more cautious as, like the Commission, it acknowledges that a lack of respect for the mechanisms that guarantee the implementation of environmental legislation and governance is a regrettable factor that contributes to unfair competition and economic harm.

## The EESC also joins the Commission in stressing that current shortcomings are undermining people's trust in the effectiveness of EU legislation, and calls on the Member States and the Commission to mobilise substantial funding for the recruitment of additional staff, in order to monitor the implementation of environmental governance and legislation.

## As stated in the Better results through better application communication[[1]](#footnote-2), "infringements of EU law are no routine matter" and should not be treated as such. The EESC thinks non-compliance with EU law needs to be addressed at an appropriately high level and in a timely manner, which is not the case in the current communication[[2]](#footnote-3).

## The communication only addresses capacity-building and support at Member State level. None of the measures relate to monitoring and enforcement at EU level by the Commission as "guardian of the treaty". The action plan fails to address reasons for non-compliance beyond confusion and lack of capacity, such as opportunism and lack of political will. While support of Member States is necessary, the soft measures of this action plan cannot be the sole strategy for improving environmental compliance.

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

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

* ***Provisions for fishing in the GFCM (General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean) Agreement Area***

**Reference:** Category C opinion

 COM(2018) 143 final - 2018/0069(COD)

 EESC-2018-02319-00-00-AC-TRA

Since the Committee endorses the content of the Commission proposal and feels that it requires no comment on its part, it decided to issue an opinion supporting the proposed text.

***Contact:*** *Arturo Iniguez*

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

# **Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship**

* ***Transparent and predictable working conditions directive***

**Rapporteur:** Christian Bäumler (Workers – DE)

**Co-rapporteur:** Vladimíra Drbalová (Employers – CZ)

**Reference:** EESC-2018-00300-00-00-AC-TRA

 COM(2017) 797 final – 2017/0355 (COD)

**Key points**

* The EESC supports the Commission's effort to make working conditions for all workers, particularly those in atypical employment, more transparent and predictable as a concrete step towards implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.
* Social partners have a specific role in regulating transparent and predictable working conditions through social dialogue and collective bargaining, respecting the diversity among the Member States and national practices. Some of the Member States have addressed the challenges of atypical employment through collective agreements, social dialogue or legislation.
* The EESC recognises the particular situation of natural persons acting as employers, and micro and small enterprises and recommends that appropriate assistance be provided to such entities.
* Member States must be able to determine, under the social dialogue, who falls within the scope of "worker", but this must be interpreted in the light of the purpose of the directive. Further clarification is recommended so that platform workers also benefit from the protection of the directive. However, people using platforms who are genuinely self-employed and independent should be excluded. The personal scope of the directive with regard to the definition of an employer should also be clarified.
* The EESC believes that on-demand work cannot be maintained as a form of employment without an appropriate reference period and advance notice. Employment contracts that provide for on-demand work should guarantee a certain number of hours or corresponding payment.
* The EESC supports the provisions relating to minimum requirements relating to working conditions, notably regarding the length of the probationary period, restrictions on the prohibition of employment in parallel, minimum predictability of work, transitioning to another form of employment where available, and the provision of cost-free training where this is required for the worker to carry out the work. However, the EESC recommends clarification of certain aspects, recommending that responsibility be left up to the national level according to national legal and social dialogue practices.
* The EESC believes that for the effective application of the directive, it is right for workers to be protected from dismissal. Sanctions, where they are justified, should correspond with the level of damage suffered by the worker. The EESC welcomes the provision under Article 14(1) giving employers 15 days to complete the missing information.
* The proposal sets out minimum standards for convergence and it is important that workers who currently enjoy better material rights should not fear deterioration in their existing rights when the directive is implemented.

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

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 81 34 – e-mail:* *june.bedaton@eesc.europa.eu* *)*

* ***Interoperability between EU information systems (borders, visas, police and judicial cooperation, asylum and migration)***

**Rapporteur:** Laure Batut (Workers – FR)

**Reference:** EESC-2018-00446-00-00-AC-TRA

 COM(2017) 793 final – 2017/0351 (COD)]

 COM(2017) 794 final – 2017/0352 (COD)

**Key points**

The EESC:

* considers the European Commission's proposal for improving interoperability between EU information systems for borders and visas and for police and judicial cooperation, asylum and migration to be useful and positive;
* finds that this interoperability needs to be a strategic objective for the EU, in order for the Union to continue to be an open area that safeguards fundamental rights and mobility. The EU and the Member States have an obligation to protect the lives and the safety of all human beings;
* is of the opinion that there will be more understanding for the interoperability measures if they ensure a balance between freedom and security in accordance with the separation of powers, safeguard the fundamental rights of the people concerned, reiterate the requirement of including data protection principles from the design stage and do not create new barriers to the normal flow of passengers and freight;
* calls for the procedures and guarantees regarding the use of data for law enforcement purposes to provide for application of the General Data Protection Regulation;
* requires the parties responsible to report annually to the decision-making authorities and to the Commission regarding the security of the interoperability components, and every two years on the impact of the measures on fundamental rights;
* recommends robust training programmes for the authorities concerned and eu-LISA staff, also strict checks on the competences of staff of and applicants for that agency;
* has concerns about the funding for the new system. It is crucial to follow up on the planning in order to avoid budget slippage and see the project through to the end in 2029;
* recommends that the public should be kept informed of progress on the project until its completion;
* considers that the possibility must be available of halting the whole project if freedom and fundamental rights were to be threatened by abuse of the system.

***Contact:*** *Triin Aasmaa*

 *(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9524 – email:* *triin.aasmaa@eesc.europa.eu**)*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. 2017/C 18/02. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. COM(2018) 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)