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***European Economic and Social Committee***

Brussels, 7 January 2018

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| **PLENARY SESSION    12 AND 13 DECEMBER 2018    SUMMARY OF OPINIONS ADOPTED** |
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The following opinions were adopted in the plenary session of 12 and 13 December 2018:

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

* ***European System of Financial Supervision (ESFS) – Amended proposal to fight money laundering***

**Rapporteur-general:** Petr ZAHRADNÍK (Employers – CZ)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 646 final – 2017/0230 (COD)

EESC-2018-04922-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* appreciates the agility with which the European Commission is responding to the money laundering problems;
* thinks that, in addition to strengthening the coordination between supervisory authorities and streamlining procedures, operations should also be coordinated with other relevant parties;
* underlines the increasing importance of this problem in relation to third countries;
* finds that it is preferable to move in stages so as to avoid significant disruptions to the stability and functioning of the existing system;
* stresses the importance of internal and external communication on money laundering and financing of terrorism:
* internal communications: improving and protecting information streams between the supervisory bodies concerned;
* external communication: the public in question should be provided with information and made aware of the different ways this kind of crime may be presented, as a means of preventing and preparing for it;
* would like to see a more detailed outline of the new relationships between the European Banking Authority and the other EU supervisory authorities, as well as the national and, especially, third-country supervisory authorities.

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

*(Tel: 00 32 2 546 9909 - email:* [*gerald.klec@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:gerald.klec@eesc.europa.eu) *)*

# **Single Market, Production and Consumption**

1. ***Retail sector***

**Rapporteur:** Ronny LANNOO (Diversity Europe – BE)

**Corapporteur:** Gerardo LARGHI (Workers – IT)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 219 final

EESC-2018-02861-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* notes that the Commission's proposal focuses too much on "price" as the most interesting element for consumers, to the detriment of other key aspects such as information, product quality and personalisation, proximity, mobility, the circular economy and durability, value for money and service received before or after purchase;
* considers that the creation of an effective social dialogue mechanism that also involves small and micro enterprises would give businesses better development opportunities and workers a better system of safeguards;
* calls on the competent authorities at all levels to engage in close cooperation with all stakeholders, with a view to drawing up a specific action plan on the future of European retail in the 21st century.

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

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 83 20 – email:* [*marie-laurence.drillon@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:marie-laurence.drillon@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

1. ***Report on Competition Policy 2017***

**Rapporteur:** Baiba MILTOVIČA (Diversity Europe – LV)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 482 final

EESC-2018-04011-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* believes that the reinforcement of NCAs' autonomy and the provision of adequate resources is vital. Genuine independence, expertise and training are necessary for effective work;
* argues in the area of private legal enforcement of the competition rules and that class actions should be facilitated by the legal systems of all Member States;
* believes that further proposals on franchising, to be included in the Block Exemption Regulation in order to restore the commercial and contractual balance between franchisees and the franchisor, should be considered;
* considers that where there are significant para-commercial activities run by local authorities these should be studied to see whether an adaptation of state aid rules or other instruments is necessary;
* urges specific provision within the Multiannual Financial Framework to monitor anti-competitive practices being created within the digital economy.

***Contact:*** *Alice Tétu*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 82 86 – email:* [*alice.tetu@eesc.europa.eu*](file:///\\isis\dfs\shr-dira-int-cese\Section\Réunions\185%20-%2021-11-2018\alice.tetu@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

1. ***Application of Articles 107 et 108 TFUE to certain categories of horizontal State aid***

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

**Reference:** COM(2018) 398 final – 2018/0222 (NLE)

EESC-2018-04706-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* considers this proposal to be necessary and timely. In view of the future multiannual financial framework, it makes a decisive contribution to ensuring that the Commission plays a strong role in the selection of supported projects in accordance with a common EU interest, and that public support will complement private investment in a fully transparent manner.

***Contact:*** *Alice Tétu*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 82 86 – email:* [*alice.tetu@eesc.europa.eu*](file:///\\isis\dfs\shr-dira-int-cese\Section\Réunions\185%20-%2021-11-2018\alice.tetu@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***Appellations of Origine and Geographical Indications***

**Rapporteur:** Arnold PUECH D'ALISSAC (Employers – FR)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 365 final – 2018/0189 (COD)

EESC-2018-04958-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

## Given the importance of geographical indications (GI) for European Union producers, the European Commission should always act with a view to protecting production models and quality systems recognised globally for the beneficial effect of their sustainability on consumers and producers;

* the EESC, while supporting the Commission's proposal, believes that a system is needed that ensures fair treatment of all European producers wishing to have their geographical indications recognised at international level as well; the rights accrued by these geographical indications already registered and protected at European level should be preserved in order to avoid penalties and unequal treatment.

***Contact:*** *Jean-Pierre Faure*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 96 15 – email:* [*jean-pierre.faure@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:jean-pierre.faure@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

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

* ***Minimum level of training of seafarers***

**Rapporteur:** Tanja BUZEK (Workers – DE)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 315 final – 2018/0162 (COD)

EESC-2018-04142-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC broadly supports the objectives set out by the Commission in its proposal amending Directive 2008/106/EC on the minimum level of training of seafarers, repealing Directive 2005/45/EC on the mutual recognition of seafarers' certificates issued by Member States. The EESC considers the changes provided in the regulatory framework to be necessary, proportionate and cost effective.

Whilst acknowledging the fact that both directives have contributed to both the improvement of maritime education and training of seafarers working on board EU-flagged vessels and the professional mobility of seafarers certified in the EU, the EESC considers it advisable to take one step further in that field. Therefore, the EESC recommends capitalising on the revision of Directive 2008/106/EC to call for a wider European debate involving the Commission, the Member States, the training institutions and the industry on how to further invest in the European maritime skills base in order to safeguard both the competitiveness of the European fleet and the sector's capacity to generate good quality jobs for European seafarers and other maritime professionals.

In particular, the EESC recommends working towards establishing an EU forum involving the training institutions, the industry, the broader maritime cluster and national maritime administrations to improve seafarers' maritime training and to develop European maritime postgraduate courses which go beyond the internationally agreed minimum level of training of seafarers. Such advanced training would make it possible to create a competitive advantage for European seafarers by equipping them with skills above those required at international level and enhance the attractiveness of the seafaring professions in the EU, especially as regards women and young people.

Regarding the revamped mechanism for the recognition of seafarers' certificates issued by third countries, the EESC sees it of upmost importance for requesting Member States to consult with national shipowners' associations and trade union organisations on the desirability of recognising a new third country, prior to submitting the request to the Commission. The EESC wishes further to clarify that – where available – the estimation of seafarers likely to be employed will only be one criteria in the decision process of the recognition of a new third country and that it needs to be followed in a transparent manner.

As there can be no compromise on maritime safety, the EESC recommends that those third countries which supply a limited number of masters and officers to the EU fleet should not undergo a less stringent reassessment regime than the other countries.

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

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9363 - email:* [*Antonio.RibeiroPereira@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Antonio.RibeiroPereira@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***EURATOM Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025)***

**Rapporteur:** Giulia BARBUCCI (Workers – IT)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 437 final – 2018/0226 (NLE)

EESC-2018-04405-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the proposal for a regulation for the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) research and training programme 2021-2025;
* considers the EURATOM budget to be proportionate to the objectives set and considers it essential to maintain this financial allocation regardless of the outcome of the Brexit negotiations. The Committee also considers it crucial in this respect to manage the United Kingdom's exit from the Euratom programme with the utmost care, particularly with regard to research already in progress, shared infrastructure and the social impact on staff (e.g. working conditions) both on British soil and elsewhere;
* considers the Joint European Taurus project (JET) to be a key factor for the development of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project, ITER being, from a scientific point of view, the successor to JET. For this reason, the Committee considers it important that JET remain operational (as an EU project or as a joint EU-UK project) until the ITER project comes into operation;
* emphasises that nuclear safety must be understood as a dynamic concept, which entails constant monitoring of and adjustments to existing legislation in accordance with recent developments and innovations, covering the whole life span of the plants. Plants located on borders between EU countries should be given particular attention, with increased coordination between national and local authorities and the effective involvement of citizens and workers;
* considers education – beginning with compulsory education – and training to be an essential factor in attracting young people to scientific and technological subjects.

***Contact:*** *Alessandro Rizzi*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8679 - email:* [*Alessandro.Rizzi@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Alessandro.Rizzi@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***MFF and ITER***

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

**Reference:** COM(2018) 445 final – 2018/0235 (NLE)

EESC-2018-04675-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* notes that achieving clean energy is a high priority and to this end fusion energy is recognised as a potential long-term solution with Europe being at the forefront of developing fusion technologies which are carbon-free, sustainable and help secure our mix of energy supplies;
* emphasises that the high level of long-term investment needed for the development of a fusion power plant does still entail some industrial risk, but in the event of success the realisation of a fusion power plant would be a newly introduced factor that would significantly change the existing energy supply by providing a disruptive innovation, with fusion fuel being abundant and virtually inexhaustible;
* proposal addresses the key challenges facing the next MFF to sustain the positive momentum of the ITER project. The EESC appreciates the positive progress during recent years, after overcoming problems by a major overhaul of the ITER project (new senior management and a revised ITER baseline schedule);
* encourages the Commission to emphasise more the importance of the necessity to link the ITER project and the European fusion research organised by EUROfusion, which is funded under the Research and Training Programme (EURATOM) and operates the Joint European Torus (JET), an important experimental facility located in Culham, United Kingdom;
* understands that ITER has important issues that can only be addressed in JET and it therefore echoes the concerns about the effect of Brexit on a continuation of JET.

***Contact:*** *Kristian Krieger*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8921 - email:* [*Kristian.Krieger@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Kristian.Krieger@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***MFF and nuclear decommission and radioactive waste***

**Rapporteur:** Rudy DE LEEUW (Workers – BE)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 466 final – 2018/0251 (NLE)

COM(2018) 467 final – 2018/0252 (NLE)

COM(2018) 468 final

EESC-2018-04955-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* endorses the Commission's proposal and highlights the suggestions for future support put forward in the opinion;
* does not suggest amending the proposal, but instead calls for closer monitoring of activities in areas raised in the opinion, particularly a sustainable development oriented approach in the choice of energy sources; proper consideration of the specific situation in Lithuania in particular, as well as in other countries concerned with regard to socio-economic aspects; dissemination throughout the EU of knowledge acquired in the area of dismantling and on the issue of training workers; safe and sustainable management of nuclear waste generated; and strengthening of performance indicators by including performance in relation to protecting workers from radiation.

***Contact:*** *Kristian Krieger*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8921 - email:* [*Kristian.Krieger@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Kristian.Krieger@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

# **EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

* ***Multilateral Investment Court***

**Rapporteur:** Philippe DE BUCK (Employers – BE)

**Co-rapporteur:** Tanja BUZEK (Workers – DE)

**Reference:** COM(2017) 493 final

EESC-2017-06154-00-00-AC-TRA-EN

**Key points**

The EESC:

* fully acknowledges that investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) in trade and investment treaties has become ever more controversial to a number of stakeholders over questions of legitimacy, consistency and transparency. These criticisms include, but are not restricted to, procedural and substantive considerations;
* welcomes the EU Commission's efforts towards a multilateral reform of ISDS under the auspices of UNICITRAL and considers it vital that the EU remains open to all approaches and ideas that have surfaced regarding ISDS reform;
* particularly welcomes the increased commitment towards transparency, allowing non-governmental organisations to monitor and even participate in the discussions;
* considers it vital that Working Group III of UNCITRAL will welcome the input of all relevant stakeholders in an effort to increase inclusiveness, and calls for an improved and more balanced invitation of stakeholders. The EESC further calls on the Commission to use its best endeavours to involve the EESC actively in the work of Working Group III;
* has always recognised that FDI is an important contributor to economic growth and that foreign investors must have global protection against direct expropriation, be free from discrimination and enjoy equivalent rights to domestic investors;
* however, equally, the EESC has always underlined that the right of the States to regulate in the public interest must not be undermined;
* in the context of establishing a Multilateral Investment Court, the EESC underlines that a number of fundamental questions have to be addressed: the scope, the protection of public interest, accessibility and relations with domestic courts.

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

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9108 - email:* [*gunilla.sandberg@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:gunilla.sandberg@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)***

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

**Reference:** COM(2018) 465 final – 2018/0247 (COD)

EESC-2018-04092-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) for the period 2021-2027. The EESC also welcomes the statement that IPA III should put performance at the core of the instrument thus allowing greater steering in overall funding allocations reflecting beneficiaries commitments and progress towards reforms. The use of performance indicators will contribute to the overall assessment of IPA III and is in accordance with its former recommendations for IPA II;
* welcomes the fact that the financial reference provided for under the draft Regulation on IPA III for the period 2021 to 2027 will be approximately EUR 14,5 billion. The EESC welcomes the fact that IPA III introduces more flexibility by not establishing partner allocations from the outset. The IPA programming framework should be based on evolving needs and ensure a balance between predictability and performance-based funding;
* underlines the importance of Pre-accession Assistance in furthering economic reforms and creating a favourable and predictable business environment in order to foster entrepreneurship, business creation and help SMEs grow. The EESC stresses the importance of Economic Reform Programmes and of a meaningful involvement of social partners and other CSOs in the process of development and implementation of these programmes;
* embraces the view that the progress of the IPA beneficiaries towards reforms is essential for the absorption and the exploitation of these funds and emphasises the need to reinforce a culture of cooperation between the Western Balkan beneficiaries;
* underlines the need to use Pre-accession Assistance to increase the capacity of the administration of candidates and potential candidates in order to prepare them for the future usage of structural funds and for participation in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy;
* believes that IPA III should be used to increase the understanding of fundamental EU values as well as to promote the added value of Pre-accession Assistance amongst the general population in the candidates and potential candidates.

***Contact:*** *David Hoić*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9069 - email:* [*david.hoic@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:david.hoic@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***Neighbourhood, Development and Cooperation Instrument and Nuclear Safety Cooperation Instrument***

**Rapporteur:** Cristian PÎRVULESCU (Diversity Europe – RO)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 460 final – 2018/0243 (COD)

COM(2018) 462 final – 2018/0243 (COD) 2018/0245 (NLE)

EESC-2018-04060-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The European Economic and Social Committee supports the general and specific objectives of the proposal and considers that the move to streamline the instruments used in relation to neighbourhood and third countries is welcome and useful. The EU must build a constructive, realistic and pragmatic relationship with the neighbourhood and third countries, in which values should remain central.

The Committee notes the determination of the Commission and the other European institutions and the Member States, to support the development of civil society, democracy and human rights protection systems. The functioning of the new consolidated instrument should be, in all the phases, from planning to monitoring and evaluation, geared to promote EU values, including the rule of law, integrity, pluralism, democracy and protection of human rights. In this context, the Committee urges the European Commission to significantly increase the allocation for the human rights and democracy, and civil society thematic programmes.

Streamlining and unifying the instruments used constitutes a big step forward towards efficient, priority-oriented action in pursuit of the proposed objectives. The Committee welcomes the move in this proposal to reduce the administrative burden on the EU institutions and the Member States and focus more on the political objectives and the commitment to external partners. The Committee welcomes and supports the significant advances put forward in the proposal: greater simplification and flexibility and better monitoring of results.

Neighbourhood and third countries face a number of major, diverse and overlapping problems. In the current global climate, in which reforms promoting democratisation, political stabilisation and economic development appear to have stalled, the EU must step up its efforts rather than abandoning them. It should maintain permanent contact with the governments of neighbouring and third countries, pushing and encourage them to cooperate responsibly. Its partnership-based relations with these governments should be solid, assertive and firmly geared towards improving the living conditions of the people living there.

The Committee encourages the European Commission to build on the gains and advances made with the preceding instruments, for example, the Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. The civil society organisations fighting for freedom, democracy, human rights and fair electoral processes were supported despite the hostile attitude of some governments towards them. This commitment should be maintained and advanced.

In regard to the European Instrument for Nuclear Safety, after the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe, it became perfectly clear that the problems and risks of using nuclear energy are global. Unfortunately, the proposal does not engage at strategic and political level with the legitimate demand for long-term planning for nuclear energy coming from citizens, civil society, and the business sector.

The Committee welcomes the intention of the Commission to include activities in the nuclear field that are in line with the development and international cooperation policy for health, agriculture, industry and social projects addressing the consequences of any nuclear accident. However, it is not clear how the budget available and the institutional settings in place are able to deliver on this intention in practice.

Considering the key global challenges related to nuclear energy, and the presence of a high number of nuclear energy sites in its neighbourhood, the Committee sees the projected financial envelope for the implementation of this Regulation for the 2021 – 2027 period of EUR 300 million in current prices as highly insufficient.

***Contact:*** *Lucía Mendez del Rio*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9345 - email:* [*lucia.mendezdelriocabra@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:lucia.mendezdelriocabra@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

# **AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

* ***Water reuse***

**Rapporteur:** Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (Diversity Europe – LT)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 337 final - 2018/0169 (COD)

EESC-2018-02925-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

## The EESC welcomes this proposed regulation as a useful addition in realising the intentions of the Water Framework Directive and also as contributing to the Circular Economy Package. It will encourage existing water resources to be used more sustainably and increase consumer confidence in the safety of those agricultural products affected.

## At present consumers are unaware of the varying standards on water reuse. As this regulation provides for a consistent approach based on strong scientific advice, it can be seen as a necessary foundation block in food safety policy.

## Contrary to the impression created by the general title of the regulation, the actual substance of the proposal is tightly focussed on the reuse of urban waste water for irrigation purposes. It is recommended that greater prominence is given to this focus to minimise concerns that industrial and domestic reuse opportunities are being ignored.

## The potential of water reuse for aquifer recharge, although not the object of the regulation, remains of interest and further technical analysis should be undertaken to resolve the complex problems identified in the impact assessment.

## The Committee strongly recommends that, for this regulation to have its maximum intended impact, effective policing of water resources and an active accountability and enforcement regime needs to be followed in all Member States. In particular, the enforcement of prohibitions on illegal water extraction needs to be applied more consistently.

Although impacts on competition with imports from third countries are expected to be neutral, the EESC urges the Commission to take this opportunity to use this development of standards at EU level to reinforce the stance in international standard-setting discussions on water reuse so imports from third countries are also compliant. The EESC has regularly argued for consistency in international agricultural standards and this regulation can set a global benchmark for water reuse.

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

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

* ***Facilitating access to climate finance for non-state actors***

**Rapporteur:** Cillian Lohan (Diversity Europe – IE)

**Reference:** Own initiative opinion

EESC-2018-04425-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

## Although large funds have been pledged in Climate Finance pacts, the EESC wants to highlight a problem with small scale non-state climate actors accessing financing to ensure potentially transformative initiatives are supported and can happen.

## The flows of climate finance in the European Union need to be urgently monitored and mapped. This will facilitate measuring the impact for non-state climate actors, and ensure the progress on a wider transformation of the economy to a low carbon model can be assessed.

## The sources of finance are disparate, as are the bottom-up initiatives that require access. Mechanisms to address this disconnect are not in place. This should be addressed by establishing an inclusive Climate Finance Forum at the EU level.

## The EESC is proposing a Climate Finance Forum to address the key issues, bringing together key stakeholders to identify barriers, design solutions, and identify most efficient mechanisms for improved distribution of finance, including a type of match making service that links projects and appropriate climate finance sources to each other.

## A mechanism for reaching initiatives that require smaller sums needs to be created (then effectively communicated) that includes:

* + simplified application process
  + simplified reporting requirements
  + match funding
  + supports for projects at design stage, pre-application for funding and
  + supports for capacity building, networking, exchange and platform development at local, regional, national and European level.

## A focus on climate finance should not be to the exclusion of responsible financing in other areas. All financing should be climate proofed to ensure that any funding and financing outside of specified climate finance is not working against the climate commitments and targets. This needs to be adhered to in the context of the Paris Agreement Article 2.1c, for existing finance flows to be consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.

A toolkit needs to be developed, with a clear communication strategy, that empowers non-state actors at all levels to understand and be able to access climate finance. The toolkit should facilitate project developers to design projects that will contribute to a low carbon and climate-resilient economy.

***Contact:*** *Stella Brozek-Everaert*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 92 02 – email:* [*Stella.BrozekEveraert@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Stella.BrozekEveraert@eesc.europa.eu) *)*

* ***Alignment of environmental reporting obligations***

**Rapporteur:** Vladimír NOVOTNÝ (Employers – CZ)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 381 final – 2018/0205 (COD)

EESC-2018-02960-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

## welcomes the European Commission's proposal for aligning reporting obligations in environmental policy and expects it to result in increased transparency of reports and their drafting, the provision of an empirical basis for gauging the efficacy of environmental policies, simplified procedures and a reduced administrative burden for both the Commission and the Member States;

## fully supports the European Commission's new approach to environmental reporting, which is based on a root-and-branch modernising of procedures for data collection, reporting and subsequent environmental assessment using the INSPIRE and Copernicus systems, transmission of data in real time and their electronic processing. The EESC believes that the Commission's proposal complies with the better regulation approach and with the REFIT programme;

## recommends that the central databases of the European Environment Agencybe used for linking data and information on the environment with geographical, economic and social data and for interpreting this in the round;

## again urges the need to involve civil society organisations in the drafting and discussion of environmental reports in the Member States;

## takes the view that adapting to changes in specific environmental reporting requirements works better than a rigidly unified, one-size-fits-all approach, provided the high quality of environmental data and reports is maintained.

***Contact:*** *Laura Broomfield*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 82 58 – email:* [*Laura.Broomfield@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Laura.Broomfield@eesc.europa.eu) *)*

* ***Implementation of EU environmental legislation in the areas of air quality, water and waste***

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

**Reference:** Exploratory opinion at the request of European Parliament  
EESC-2018-02510-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC welcomes the purpose of the Environmental Implementation Review (EIR), which is to provide an informed picture of where each Member State stands, identifying their main shortcomings in implementing EU environmental legislation, as well as to recommend remedial measures and to provide support to those Member States lagging behind in terms of implementation, in particular through a new peer-to-peer tool for technical assistance.

In its opinion on this subject however, the EESC considers that the EU EIR reveals that poor, fragmented and uneven implementation of the EU environmental legislation is a serious problem in many EU Member States. Both now as in the past, behind the root causes of poor implementation identified in the EIR there still appears to be a lack of political will on the part of many Member State governments to make substantial improvement a political priority and to provide sufficient resources (e.g. through the multiannual financial framework – MFF). The EESC therefore recalls that proper implementation of the EU's environmental acquis is in the interest of European citizens and has real economic and social benefits.

Similarly, as argued in the above-mentioned opinion, the EESC reiterates that effective implementation of environmental protection measures hinges partly on civil society - employers, workers and other representatives of society − being granted an active role. The EESC consequently repeats its call for stronger and structured involvement of civil society, which would have the potential to strengthen EIRs. For the EESC, civil society organisations at national level must be given the opportunity to contribute their expertise and insight to the country reports as well as to the structured country dialogues and the follow-up to them. For this reason, the EESC is ready to facilitate civil society dialogue at EU level in the framework of a truly sustainable and circular economy.

The EESC underlines that in some cases, environmental investments, awareness raising of the public or strong enforcement chains are also needed and that even if environmental inspectors already exist, Europe and its Member States also need specialised judges and prosecutors.

Moreover, since a number of European Commission documents show that many shortcomings are due to a lack of cooperation between different governance levels (national, regional, local) response for implementing environmental legislation, the EESC also urges the EU to involve civil society in the ongoing monitoring and evaluating of this implementation.

EU citizens consider environmental protection to be of crucial importance. The majority of citizens however think that the EU and national governments are not doing enough to protect the environment. The Council, Parliament and Commission should consequently work together more closely with the EESC's help to meet people's expectations. More specifically, this ambition could take the form of requesting the EESC to draw up an exploratory opinion on how civil society could contribute more to drafting and applying EU environmental legislation.

The EESC considers that the Commission should not only propose legislation, but also facilitate and support the application of law, and also make existing texts more consistent with each other and bring them more into line with scientific advances and international commitments intended to protect public health and restore the proper functioning of ecosystems. Without these ecosystems neither economic development nor social justice is possible. In particular, the implementation of environmental legislation is essential for the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to put climate agreements into practice. Consequently, the EESC draws the attention of the competent authorities to a number of examples of improvements to environmental legislation concerning air, water and waste in this opinion.

Lastly, in the light of the recent proposal for a directive on single-use plastics, it appears certain that the high level of acceptance of the proposed measures is due to the information and media measures on plastic pollution of the oceans, which have brought about greater citizens' awareness of the problem. The EESC considers that the same applies for many other measures capable of providing people living in the EU with a healthy place to live and adaptation to climate disruption, and of halting the collapse in biodiversity. In this regard, the EESC restates the need for the committed participation of civil society in favour of population education and the expected redoubling of efforts by European, national and local authorities to making the public, together with public and private decision-makers (in particular in SMEs-SMIs), to these major challenges of the 21st century.

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

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

* ***European Maritime and Fisheries Fund***

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

**Reference:** COM (2018) 390 final – 2018/0210 (COD)

EESC-2018-04062-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the Commission proposal, which provides a more flexible system for the Member States in line with their strategic priorities, and aims to support a sustainable business model for fishers and maintain the competitiveness of the fisheries sector. In particular, the EESC asks for rapid approval, a more accessible financing mechanism and a more proportionate and harmonised sanctions system;
* encourages the European Commission and the Member States to take stronger action by enforcing the full traceability of imports, from both an IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated [fishing]) and a food safety perspective;
* recommends the financing of new ships to replace old ones provided that the fleet concerned has no excess capacity and the target species are fished at MSY (maximum sustainable yield) levels. This measure should include the use of more sustainable and efficient engines to reduce CO2 emissions and to ensure crew safety.

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

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

* ***Clean air for all***

**Rapporteur:** Octavian Cătălin ALBU (Employers – RO)

**Reference:** COM (2018) 330 final

EESC-2018-03845-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC considers that it is imperative to reduce pollution in the commercial, institutional, household and transport sectors. The institutions and Member States must set a good example here, and more support programmes must be set up to help individuals shift to clean, modern and more energy efficient forms of heating.

The additional legislative measures proposed by the European Commission to remedy certain problems, such as Dieselgate, or action taken against Member States which have failed to comply with current rules on air pollution are a step in the right direction and the EESC endorses this approach.

The EESC firmly believes that the new environmental and transport regulations must be flanked by economic support measures to promote innovation and the development of new clean technologies, such as fuel cells, electric cars and alternative heating and ventilation systems.

International cooperation is crucial for combating pollution and climate change, and the EESC welcomes the broad consensus among Member States on meeting the Paris Agreement objectives. The exchange of good practices in this area and the Green Diplomacy Network are very important. Furthermore, specific measures are needed to reduce pollutants in the Member States in order to meet the Agreement's targets.

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

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

* ***Fisheries control***

**Rapporteur:** Emilio FATOVIC (Workers – IT)

**Reference:** COM (2018) 368 final – 2018/0193 (COD)

EESC-2018-04143-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC broadly endorses the Commission’s proposal on fisheries control. However, some problems have not been adequately addressed or clearly resolved.

The EESC is opposed to the blanket obligation to install closed circuit television (CCTV) in vessels and therefore proposes that risk assessments on certain fleet segments characterised by a high and widespread level of serious infringements are carried out by Member States and then, depending on their history of past non-compliance, control authorities ask these vessels to install CCTV.

The new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2021-2027 will play a key role in enabling European vessels to adapt to the new legal provisions. It is imperative that funding be readily accessible at national level for all those who request it. In particular, the Committee is opposed to introducing retroactive rules whereby, in the event of a single serious infringement, the operator would be obliged to repay any funds previously received and correctly reported.

The EESC points out that the worst instances of fraud and failure to comply with law occur in third countries, and yet fish caught as a result of such illegal practices still ends up on European tables with relative ease. It is important for the new traceability systems to address these problems as well, by monitoring the entire supply chain.

The EESC notes that it is difficult to adapt successful models offered by multiannual plans for single-species fisheries to mixed fisheries, and this can have a severe impact on the environment and on the economy. The Committee therefore recommends a system for collecting more detailed data on stock with a view to devising ad hoc strategies that can better protect biodiversity without causing excessive damage to the fisheries sector.

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

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

# **EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP**

* ***The costs of non-immigration and non-integration***

**Rapporteur:** Pavel TRANTINA (Diversity Europe – CZ)

**Co-rapporteur:** José Antonio MORENO DÍAZ (Workers – ES)

**Reference:** Own-initiative opinion

EESC-2018-02459-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* considers that immigration has a positive influence on population and labour force growth. If natural population growth becomes negative, immigration can help keep the total population and labour force constant;
* points out that a non-immigration scenario in Europe would mean among other things that:
  + Member States' economies would suffer substantially; job markets would come under possibly irreconcilable strain, whole industries would go bust, agricultural production would drop, construction would not be able to keep up with demand;
  + Demographic challenges would be aggravated; pension systems might become unsustainable, the health and care sector could collapse, depopulation of certain areas would proceed at a swift pace;
  + Racism and xenophobia would flourish even more than at present;
* highlights, in contrast, the following potential of migration in host countries: job vacancies and skills gaps can be filled, economic growth can be sustained and services to an ageing population can be maintained when there are insufficient young people locally etc. Countries of origin benefit from remittances, which outstrip foreign aid. Returning migrants bring savings, skills and international contacts;
* stresses that non-integration bears economic, socio-cultural and political risks and costs. Hence, investment in migrant integration is the best insurance policy against potential future costs, problems and tensions;
* underlines that promoting integration is key to reinforcing EU fundamental values and principles, of which diversity, equality and non-discrimination are crucial ones. It is imperative that EU Member States learn from one another and honestly strive to foster an environment in which migrant integration is achievable and the risks are avoided.

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

*(Tel.: 0032 2 546 9524 – email:* [*triin.aasmaa@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:triin.aasmaa@eesc.europa.eu))

* ***The situation of Roma women***

**Rapporteur:** Ákos TOPOLÁNSZKY (Diversity Europe – HU)

**Reference:** Exploratory opinion requested by the European Parliament

EESC-2018-03068-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* emphasises the importance of involving Roma women in the policies that most concern them;
* proposes that in the planning and implementation of programmes aimed at Roma women, a majority of Roma women should be involved;
* calls for an end to segregated education and the setting up of training programmes for Roma women, with the aim of helping them secure better job opportunities;
* advocates the abolition of health practices which infringe ethical standards; calls for health mediators, health information points and public health initiatives as a means of working towards the Roma's right to health and reaching out to the Roma living in ghettos;
* proposes the extension or the abolition of the limitation period for the prosecution of forced sterilisations;
* encourages the promotion of social economy enterprises and support for business start-ups to facilitate the economic empowerment of Roma women, as a means to act against poverty and social exclusion;
* emphasises that unjustified and illegal evictions should be brought to an end;
* proposes the cataloguing of systematic infringements of Roma women's rights through the formulation of ''white papers'', which would be drawn up in collaboration with independent Roma community organisations;
* calls for the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention by all Member States, especially given the vulnerability of Roma women and girls of being victims of violence.

***Contact:*** *Sabrina Borg*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9727 – email:* [*sabrina.borg@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:sabrina.borg@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***Gender equality in European labour markets***

**Rapporteur:** Helena DE FELIPE LEHTONEN (Employers – ES)

**Reference:** Exploratory opinion requested by the European Parliament

EESC-2018-02567-00-00-AC-TRA

The EESC:

* considers it necessary to draw up an integrated and ambitious European strategy to tackle systemic and structural obstacles and lead to adequate policies for improving equality between women and men and to help implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights;
* reiterates the need to further tackle some well-identified challenges, such as the gender pay gap and work-life balance, and on which the EESC has already issued opinions;
* urges Member States and the EU to step up implementation the Commission's 2014 Pay Transparency Recommendation, recommends gender neutral pay systems and fully supports the objectives of the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) to close the gender pay gap by 2030;
* fully agrees with the need to reduce gender segregation in education, training and the labour market;
* requests that more efforts be dedicated to the empowerment and labour-market integration of women belonging to vulnerable groups, taking into account an intersectional approach;
* recommends that Member States adapt their tax-benefit systems to make them gender neutral and free of disincentives that could deter second earners from working or working more;
* asks for a renewed reflection with Member States on the 2002 Barcelona targets on childcare, with a view to making the targets more ambitious and extending them to cover care of other dependants;
* calls on the Parliament and Council to introduce new and adequate indicators in the future European Structural Funds, to better monitor the EU financial contribution to care services and gender equality;
* calls on the Parliament and the Council to strongly support the InvestEU programme for 2021-2027, which covers investment in the social infrastructure, for it to trigger the necessary investments in childcare (as well as after school care);
* and finds that female entrepreneurship needs to be fostered in a way that it exploits the enormous potential of the digital economy and technological innovation, and pleads to improve the access to finance of female-led enterprises;
* takes the view that EU funding should be allocated in a more gender-sensitive manner and that gender equality should be set as a stand-alone goal.

***Contact:*** *Judite Berkemeier*

*(Tel.: 0032 2 546 98 97 – email:* [*mariajudite.berkemeier@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:mariajudite.berkemeier@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***European Border and Coast Guard***

**General Rapporteur:** Antonello PEZZINI (Employers – IT)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 631 final – 2018/0330 (COD)

EESC-2018-04848-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* firmly supports the proposal to provide the Agency with its own permanent operational arm, made up of 10 000 staff, and thus, working together with the Member States, with the necessary capabilities to protect the EU's external borders, prevent irregular movements, manage legal migration, and implement the return of irregular migrants effectively;
* recommends that cooperation between the Agency and the national administrations, which are traditionally responsible for border control, be defined and organised at European level;
* believes that a clear, widely-accepted definition of the Agency's tasks will avoid overlaps and conflicts between responsibilities, and calls for the chain of command between Agency officers and national officials to be established in a clear and transparent manner;
* recommends that, in the event of specific and disproportionate challenges at external borders, the Agency should be able to intervene at the request of and in coordination with the Member State concerned, by organising and coordinating rapid interventions at the border, sending teams of standing corps equipped with their own modern equipment;
* endorses the recommendations regarding the Agency's staff on the respect for human life and restrictions on the use of firearms, and on refusing or granting visas at the border, as they are important prerogatives of the authorities responsible for law and order in the Member States;
* strongly recommends further developing the control mechanisms referred to in Annex V, Chapter 3 of the proposal applying in the event of breach of the rules by staff. The mechanisms should provide for referral to the EU courts;
* recommends that, given the role which would be played by the Agency in the event of detention of individuals and their potential return to their countries of origin, statutory staff are given training modules on respect for fundamental rights;
* calls for organised civil society to be part of the Consultative Forum, via the EESC.

***Contact:*** *Annemarie Wiersma*

*(Tel.: 0032 2 546 9376 – email:*  [*annemarie.wiersma @eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:june.bedaton@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***Preventing the dissemination of terrorist content online***

**Rapporteur:** José Antonio MORENO DÍAZ (Workers – ES)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 640 final – 2018/0331 (COD)

EESC-2018-04761-00-01-AC-TRA

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the Commission proposal on preventing the dissemination of terrorist content online, as it seeks greater security for EU inhabitants;
* reiterates the importance of the freedom of expression, freedom of access to information and communication, and the confidentiality of communications;
* finds that the regulatory measures proposed to protect the internet and safeguard the population in general must be strictly governed by law;
* emphasises that internet users must be clearly reminded of the national rules on the production of terrorist content;
* calls for the right to appeal against the administrative decision to be guaranteed with a clear explanation of this right and online tools for its exercise;
* calls for the indeterminate legal concepts such as "terrorist information, terrorist acts, terrorist groups or advocacy of terrorism" to be defined as precisely as possible;
* considers crucial the intervention of a human as mediator and intermediary in assessing online content, while recognising that automated detection (automated parameters, algorithms, search engines, etc.) is very useful;
* warns against censorship or self-imposed censorship on the Internet;
* believes that the measures proposed should help to boost trust in the internet and thus ensure the economic development of this sector;
* highlights the need to assess the effects of the application of this proposal on SMEs, as well as to consider transition arrangements facilitating their adaptation and a level playing field.

***Contact:*** *Annemarie Wiersma*

*(Tel.: 0032 2 546 9376 – email:*  [*annemarie.wiersma @eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:june.bedaton@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***Protection of personal data in the context of EP elections***

**Rapporteur:** Marina YANNAKOUDAKIS (Diversity Europe – UK)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 636 final – 2018/0328 (COD)

EESC-2018-05208-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

* In the light of the recent events in 2018 with the Facebook/Cambridge Analytica case concerning the alleged unlawful processing of personal data, the EESC supports the objectives of the Commission proposal and agrees that democracy is one of the fundamental values on which the EU is founded.

* The EESC recognises that in today’s world technological developments, social media and the storing of personal data by companies throughout the EU are a given and calls for action that protects the citizens of the EU, allows for transparency and the protection of citizens' fundamental human rights.
* Enabling the Authority for European political parties and European political foundations (the 'Authority') to impose sanctions is one way of ensuring personal data is protected and not misused for political gain. The priority is to ensure the elections are played on a level playing field and no one group can gain advantage from the use of data.
* The EESC would expect the Authority to look at areas where data infringement might take place and suggest ways to stop this and put checks and balances in place to secure data protection and use of data is within well-defined parameters.
* To ensure the Authority functions correctly there have to be secure parameters as to its powers and competences. At present, the Data Protection Authorities (DPAs) of the Member States are there to ensure that there is no misuse of data by political parties. The terms of cooperation between the Authority and national DPAs need to be defined properly.
* The DPAs in many Member States face limited resources and the Commission should consider their funding to enable them to work with the Authority.

* The EESC supports the additional staffing of the Authority with a view that this staff will be better positioned to work with the national DPAs to ensure that data protection infringements are properly investigated and where found sanctions applied.
* The EESC recognises that the procedures for the elections of the EP are Member State governed within the EU framework. The EESC also expects that infringements of data protection rules are brought to the attention of the Authority either by the DPAs or by individual parties.

***Contact:*** *Annemarie Wiersma*

*(Tel.: 0032 2 546 9376 – email:*  [*annemarie.wiersma @eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:june.bedaton@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

# **CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL CHANGE**

* ***Europe's woodworking competitiveness factors***

**Rapporteur:** Marian KRZAKLEWSKI (Workers – PL)

**Co-rapporteur:** Patrizio PESCI (Cat. 1 – IT)

**Reference:** Information report

EESC-2018-01043-00-01-RI-TRA

**Key points**

* The EESC recommends that Member States should create a positive legislative environment to promote the use of wood products knowing that wood materials can substitute for GHG-intensive materials and can play a decisive role in the global carbon cycle and in tackling climate change.
* The EESC thinks that all wood entering Europe should be certified including their traceability while it is necessary to develop new innovations in the sourcing of wood raw materials and that European R&D funds should be harnessed to support new and innovative applications of hardwood species for example by increasing the use of wood in residential and non-residential buildings to boost the competitiveness of the wood industries.
* In order to address the lack of a qualified forest harvesting workforce is negatively impacting wood availability an EU study on the "identification of current and forecast employment and business growth in forestry and identification of current and forecast human resources, skills development and training requirements in the woodworking industries" should be carried out by the competent DG of the European Commission.
* Member States and local communities should collaborate with the wood industries and should ensure adequate education, training and skills programmes, allowing for minimum proficiency and health and safety standards related to wood mobilisation, especially with regard to wood harvesting. The lifelong learning programmes should receive financial support from governments.
* The European Commission is invited to elaborate a study on the climate-related, economic and social benefits of using locally sourced harvested wood products including forest management.

***Contact:*** *Christophe Lesniak*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8215 - email:* [*Christophe.Lesniak@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Christophe.Lesniak@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***Sustainable inclusive bio-economy – new opportunities for European economy***

**Rapporteur:** Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (Diversity Europe – LT)

**Co-rapporteur:** Estelle BRENTNALL (Cat. 2 – BE)

**Reference:** Own-initiative opinion

EESC-2018-01021-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

* Introduce a long-term, coherent and transparent policy and incentive framework to promote the bioeconomy.

## The role of farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives is crucial to ensure an efficient use of natural resources and contribute to a circular bioeconomy.

## Support market creation and help consumers and the public to make informed choices about the products and industries they support through their daily purchases.

* Provide a sustainable financial return on investments through a one-stop-shop fund.
* The EU Regional Development Policy post 2020 should provide enough funds to further develop rural areas.
* Capitalise on scientific opportunities and support the uptake of innovations through a flexible, proportionate, robust legal framework.
* Enhance education, training and skills programmes for new talent and existing employees.
* Explore biomass usage. A more efficient use of the existing biomass supply must be a priority to meet the growing demand for feedstock.

***Contact:*** *Adam Plezer*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8628 - email:* [*Adam.Plezer@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Adam.Plezer@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***European Defence Fund***

**Rapporteur:** Aurel Laurenţiu PLOSCEANU (Employers – RO)

**Co-rapporteur:** Eric BRUNE (Cat. 2 – FR)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 476 final

EESC-2018-03920-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

* The EESC is calling for significant qualitative progress on European defence cooperation. Indeed, limited cooperation between Member States on defence generates duplications and results in a defence industry that remains highly fragmented.

## The EESC supports the objective of strategic autonomy, with the development of key technologies in critical areas and strategic capabilities.

* A *sine qua non* for the development of common defence capabilities is to strengthen the industrial and technological base of European defence.
* The European Union needs to work on maintaining, renewing and developing a highly skilled workforce and to secure workers with such skills.
* The EESC strongly supports giving special attention to SMEs, also start-ups, including in the area of research and development for defence purposes.
* The EESC would argue that the EU budget in support of defence activities should not replace or be a substitute for national defence spending, but rather boost and accelerate more and better defence cooperation.
* The EESC is concerned about the future of cooperation with the UK after Brexit, and argues for strong security and defence which includes the UK's association with the EDF.

***Contact:*** *Adam Plezer*

*(Tel. : 00 32 2 546 8628 - email:* [*Adam.Plezer@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Adam.Plezer@eesc.europa.eu) *)*

* ***European Globalization Adjustment Fund***

**Rapporteur:** Vladimír NOVOTNÝ (Employers – CZ)

**Co-rapporteur:** Pierre GENDRE (Cat. 2 – FR)

**Reference:** COM(2018) 380 final

EESC-2018-03907-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

* The Opinion welcomes the new Commission's proposal enabling the EGF to continue beyond 2020 and expressly welcomes the extension of the scope of the fund to include labour market risks caused by structural changes that are brought about by other factors such as digitalisation and developments in the area of decarbonisation.
* It also welcomes the enlargement of the eligibility criteria (mainly decrease of number of workers affected down to 250), co-financing rules and mobilisation procedure and the rising of the budgetary threshold (up to 1.6 billion over 2021-2027, on average 225 million euros per year - currently 170 million per year).
* It underlines that EGF should be better aligned with other EU policies and that the specifications of its interactions with other European funds and programmes should be set out in greater detail (e.g. FEAD, ESF, EaSI, EU Health Programme).
* It suggests that given the contradiction between the fund's current name and its objectives, the EESC proposes changing the name to a similar one that would fit into the English abbreviation EGF.
* It underlines that Member States and all Union Institutions involved to reduce processing time and simplify procedures to ensure rapid adoption of decisions.
* It points out that is in favour of the Commission's proposal under which displaced workers and self-employed persons whose activity has ceased should have equal access to the EGF independently of their employment relationship or contract.

***Contact:*** *Amélia Muñoz Cabezón*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8373 - email:* [*Amelia.MunozCabezon@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Amelia.MunozCabezon@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

* ***Creative Europe***

**Rapporteur:** Emmanuelle BUTAUD-STUBBS (Employers – FR)

**Co-rapporteur:** Zbigniew KOTOWSKI (Cat. 3 – PL)

**Reference:** EESC-2018-03933-00-00-AC-TRA

**Key points**

* Since creative acts and processes do not always fall within the general framework of labour law, the EESC finds it important to tackle social challenges that relate to working conditions, unpaid hours, gender gaps, decent labour, health and safety conditions, mobility, people with disabilities, sexual harassment and so on.
* The EESC considers the planned budget of EUR 1.8 billion not sufficient in order to meet the ambitious goals of the Creative Europe programme 2021-2027, which is why the EESC calls for a larger budget.
* The EESC believes that it is necessary to invest in legal and technical tools in order to fight against violence and discrimination, particularly in the production of online video games for children and young people.
* The EESC supports the inclusion of a creative and cultural dimension in the external policy of the EU.
* The EESC asks the European Commission to launch a tender for a business intelligence report expected in 2019 on the major economic and technological trends in the US affecting media, cinema and audiovisual and their likely consequences on their EU counterparts in the field of production, consumption, and distribution.
* Given the fact the UK which is a key player in these industries, the EESC asks the European Commission to support bilateral dialogue between governments and networks.

***Contact:*** *Aleksandra Wieczorek*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 9389 - email:* [*Aleksandra.Wieczorek@eesc.europa.eu*](mailto:Aleksandra.Wieczorek@eesc.europa.eu)*)*

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