

**EN**

Brussels, 21 December 2020

|  |
| --- |
| **556th PLENARY SESSION2 AND 3 DECEMBER 2020SUMMARY OF OPINIONS ADOPTED** |
| **This document is available in the official languages on the EESC website at:**<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/plenary-session-summaries>**The opinions listed can be consulted online using the EESC search engine:**<https://dmsearch.eesc.europa.eu/search/opinion> |

**Contents:**

[**1.** **SINGLE MARKET, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION** 3](#_Toc56434062)

[**2.** **Economic and Monetary Union, Economic and Social Cohesion** 5](#_Toc56434063)

[**3.** **EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP** 6](#_Toc56434064)

[**4.** **AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT** 12](#_Toc56434065)

[**5.** **TRANSPORT, ENERGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INFORMATION SOCIETY** 13](#_Toc56434066)

The plenary session of 2 and 3 December 2020 was characterised by a remote-intervention by **Sinéad Burke**, disability advocate and director of Tilting the Lens; and a remote intervention by **Margrethe Vestager**, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission – A Europe Fit for the Digital Age.

The following opinions were adopted at the plenary session:

# **SINGLE MARKET, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION**

* ***Industrial transition towards a green and digital European economy: regulatory requirements and the role of social partners and civil society***

**Rapporteur-general:** Lucie Studničná (Workers' Group – CZ)

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

EESC-2020-03642-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

The EESC:

## believes that it is essential to recognise the complementarity between climate change, circular economy policies, and corporate social responsibility, and to highlight the circular characteristics of energy from renewable sources;

## stresses that the role of employers, entrepreneurs and private sector engagement in driving structural change are key to industrial transition. As innovation in Europe typically emerges from small entities, a focus is needed on creating a favourable business environment for and promoting the potential of small and medium enterprises that provide high-level knowledge-based services. The experience of social economy enterprises and organisations should also be harnessed;

## recommends that European and national institutions introduce new governance structures that can ensure the active involvement of the local economy, social partners and civil society in designing and implementing fair measures to ensure that transitions are socially just;

## recommends incorporating into the European semester new, improved, measurable and complementary social, economic and environmental indicators to monitor and keep track of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

***Contact***: *Silvia Staffa*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 83 78 – email:* *Silvia.Staffa@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Cross-border payments/Codification***

**Rapporteur:** Gonçalo Lobo Xavier (Employers' Group – PT)

**Reference:** COM(2020) 323 final -2020/0145 COD

EESC-2020-04216-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

The EESC:

## welcomes the Commission's proposal on cross-border payments in the Union, which aims to reduce the cost of cross-border payments in euro and increase the transparency of currency conversion charges;

## endorses the fact that the Commission should analyse further possibilities – and the technical feasibility of those possibilities – of extending the equal charges rule to all Union currencies and of further improving the transparency and comparability of currency conversion charges.

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

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 83 20 – email:* *Marie-Laurence.Drillon@eesc.europa.eu**)*

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

* ***Temporary VAT measures for Covid-19 vaccines***

**Reference:**  Category C opinion

COM(2020) 688 final – 2020/0311 CNS

EESC-2020-05307-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

The EESC endorses the European Commission's proposal. As regards the observations and recommendations in substance, the EESC refers to its opinion on the matter: *Postponement of taxation rules due to the COVID-19 crisis, adopted on 10 June 2020*[[1]](#footnote-2).

***Contact:*** *Juri Soosaar*

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

* ***Capital increase of the European Investment Fund (2020)***

**Reference:**  Category C opinion

COM(2020) 774 final – 2020/0343 COD

EESC-2020-05452-00-01-AC

**Key points:**

Since the Committee endorses the contents of the proposal and has already set out its views on the *Proposal for regulation establishing the InvestEU programme*, it decided to issue an opinion endorsing the proposed text.

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

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 40 – email:* *Krisztina.PerlakyToth@eesc.europa.eu**)*

# **EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP**

* ***Towards an EU strategy for enhancing green skills and competences for all***

**Rapporteur-general:** Tatjana Babrauskienė (Workers' Group – LT)

**Reference:**  Own-initiative opinion

EESC-2020-01255-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

The EESC:

## emphasises that environmental responsibility is everyone's obligation and that achieving sustainable environmental development requires drastic social change;

## believes that green skills, environmental responsibility and sustainable development should be integrated within the learning outcomes of the formal, informal and non-formal learning of all age learners;

## calls for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and of the first pillar of the European Pillar of Social Rights, with the involvement of social partners;

## reminds that environmental policies should be better connected to employment and education policies;

## calls for the establishment of national policies, focussing on education on environmental responsibility and green skills, as well as pro-active upskilling and reskilling to facilitate the just transition to a green economy for all;

## calls for comprehensive policies and funding to support teachers and trainers in their professional development on environmental protection and training on green skills and competences;

## welcomes the fact that the 2020 Skills Agenda focuses on green skills, but regrets that this does not provide a target on the share of adults participating in training on at least basic green skills and competences;

## welcomes the Commission's plan for a European competence framework, as announced in the European Green Deal; recommends that this competence framework be applicable to formal, informal and non-formal learning under the Open Method of Cooperation, involving the relevant stakeholders;

## calls on the Commission to conduct research on green skills and competence development in Member States, and to base its policy strategy thereon;

## calls for more cooperation between the Education, Employment and Environment Council to link the fight against climate change with the importance of providing green skills and competences for all as from the highest level of decision-making;

## calls for a comprehensive EU level strategy such as a Council recommendation, addressing the improvement of education and training on green skills and competences, the development of green school strategies and the provision of upskilling and reskilling in skills for environmental protection, for society and for greening the economy.

***Contact:*** *Jean-Marie Rogue*

*(Tel.: 0032 2 546 8909 – email:* *jeanmarie.rogue@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***The need to guarantee real rights for persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections***

**Rapporteur:** Krzysztof Pater (Diversity Europe Group – PL)

**Reference:**  Own-initiative opinion

EESC-2020-01950-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

In each of the 27 EU countries, there are rules or organisational arrangements that deprive some voters with disabilities of the possibility of participating in European Parliament elections.

Because of the ageing of the population, the number of people deprived of the right to vote is going to increase steadily in the coming years. This applies to people living at home, or in long-term care institutions, as well as those undergoing short-term care in hospitals, people in the process of treatment or rehabilitation at home and people who are subject to isolation or quarantine due to epidemiological risks.

The EESC considers this unacceptable and contrary to the fundamental values of the EU, to the provisions of the Treaty on European Union and to many international legal and political acts, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the recommendations of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.

The EESC calls on the EP, the European Council and Member States to urgently amend the 1976 Electoral Act by clarifying the principles of universality, directness and secrecy of elections. This would allow to implement standards throughout the EU that would guarantee real voting rights for persons with disabilities. The standards should include at least the following:

## a ban on depriving people of the right to vote in European Parliament's elections on the grounds of disability or health status;

## to provide accessible information on voting rules;

## allowing individuals unable to access their polling station due to their disability to vote independently outside the polling station;

## implementing solutions that would enable persons with disabilities in need of significant support – such as persons who are deafblind, blind, visually impaired or having limited manual dexterity – to vote independently, without relying on assistance from other people;

## the possibility of changing the designated polling station to one that is more suited to the needs of voters with disabilities;

## a person's right to freely choose a personal assistant who will support them in exercising their right to vote.

Implementing these rules will still give Member States broad discretionary powers, but will nevertheless guarantee that as of 2024 every EU citizen will have the real right to elect their representative to the European Parliament, regardless of nationality or country of residence.

***Contact****: Valeria Atzori*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 87 74 – email:* *Valeria.Atzori@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Public services principles for stability of democratic order***

**Rapporteur:** Christian Moos (Diversity Europe Group – DE)

**Co-rapporteur**: Philip von Brockdorff (Workers' Group – MT)

**Reference:**  Exploratory opinion at the request of the German presidency

EESC-2020-02236-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

Through this opinion, the EESC aims to identify criteria and frame European recommendations to make public services operate as a stabilising element for democracy and the rule of law.

The EESC recognises the essential role of smoothly functioning public services in defending core EU values. By ensuring equal and universal access to services to all, including vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, they contribute to social progress and to a vibrant society. Effective public services can play a crucial role of "automatic stabiliser" in time of crises, which have multiplied in the last years in areas like security, economy, asylum, environment, climate and health.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown how an overburdened health system can strain human dignity. Years of austerity have affected public services, weakening their impact. Efficiency does not mean a "reduced role for the state", because poor performing public services lead to high social and economic costs. The pandemic has demonstrated the need for public services to have sufficient trained and capable staff, resources and reserves. Recognising the fundamental nature of public service missions justifies paying public servants properly and that minimum social standards are applied to them throughout Europe.

While Member States are solely responsible for their public services, the EESC proposes common European principles, including:

### European values enshrined in EU Treaties and law and the "Copenhagen criteria" are a necessary basis for good conduct by administrations in the EU and its Member States;

### all public services should consistently adhere to the principles of objectivity, integrity, neutrality, the application of law and order, and transparency, respect for others and commitment to the European Union and its citizens;

### the right to good administration reinforces societal trust. Transparency of public services ensures independent oversight and contributes to the fight against corruption;

### public services have a protective function with regards to the rule of law. Staff working in public services must be protected to be able to refuse to obey illegitimate service instructions;

### public services must ensure free access to information and remain available to everyone in person, digitalisation notwithstanding;

### public services should be interoperable at the European level. Exchanges and job rotation amongst Member States' public services should be possible. All the public services involved in allocating European funds must respect and implement public service principles.

***Contact:*** *Jean-Marie Rogue*

*(Tel.: 0032 2 546 8909 – email:* *jeanmarie.rogue@eesc.europa.eu*)

* ***EU Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs 2021-2025***

**Rapporteur-general:** Ákos Topolánszky (Diversity Europe Group – HU)

**Reference:**  COM(2020) 606 final

EESC-2020-04256-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

The EESC takes the view that, in its current form, the new EU Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs is a clear step backwards, and abandons the consensual, balanced and evidence-based approach previously taken to the fight against drugs, which had been evaluated positively.

The EESC welcomes the decision taken by the European Council's Horizontal Working Party on Drugs, at its meeting on 28 September, to ask the German Presidency of the Council to recast, by December, the document drawn up by the European Commission. The EESC strongly believes that the technical approach and public policies that formed the consensual basis for the previous EU drugs strategy must be continued and further strengthened in the 10th such strategy.

The EESC recommends that the new drugs strategy and the new EU action plan(s) in this field should significantly improve the balance between demand reduction and harm reduction interventions in terms of both the number of strategic interventions and the allocation of resources.

It is important for the agenda to address drug phenomena in a truly balanced way, using an integrated, multidisciplinary approach within a framework that is based on human rights and international cooperation, takes account of public health aspects and developments in scientific knowledge, and provides for continuous evaluation. The EU's drugs strategy should recognise drug users' fundamental rights when it comes to treatment and care, as is the case for any other category of illness.

The EESC believes that, in the longer term, there is a need to improve consistency in Member States' law enforcement practices in the interests of harmonisation, given that the existing differences between Member States' practices unquestionably undermine human rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that vulnerable groups of drug users are particularly exposed to the negative impact of the epidemiological situation, which could lead to a striking increase in the risks associated with drug use.

Indicators to assess the effects of supply reduction interventions and quality standards should be established as soon as possible on the basis of the model already being used to reduce demand.

***Contact****: Valeria Atzori*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 87 74 – email:* *Valeria.Atzori@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work***

**Reference:**  Category C opinion

COM(2020) 571 final - 2020/0262 COD

EESC-2020-05142-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

The Committee decided to endorse the proposal and to refer to its previous opinions[[2]](#footnote-3).

***Contact:*** *Sophie Zimmer*

*(Tel.: 0032 2 546 95 64 – email:* *Sophie.Zimmer@eesc.europa.eu**)*

# **AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT**

* ***Fisheries – transposition of IATTC measures***

**Rapporteur:** Francisco Javier Garat Perez (Diversity Europe Group – ES)

**Reference:** COM(2020) 308 final - 2020/0139 COD

EESC-2020-04492-00-00-AC

**Key points**:

The EESC is of the view that control, conservation and management measures adopted by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) need to be transposed into EU law, the aim being to ensure that they are uniformly and effectively implemented within the EU. The transposition should adhere strictly to what has been agreed in the IATTC, without imposing any new obligations on European vessels. The Committee therefore supports the proposal for a regulation.

However, the Committee recommends taking into account the considerations it set out in its opinion on *Conservation and enforcement measures in the area of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation*.

In the EESC's view, therefore, the proposal presented does not establish an efficient mechanism for transposing IATTC rules and does not resolve the issue of needing to update them every year.

The Committee is in favour of a mechanism that is simpler and more efficient, and therefore proposes drafting a regulation with a single article stipulating that the European Union must without fail apply IATTC rules to its fleet.

The EESC stresses the risk involved in introducing a system of delegated acts, as this would give the Commission the power to legislate without being required to follow the ordinary procedures.

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

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

# **TRANSPORT, ENERGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INFORMATION SOCIETY**

* ***2020 Single European Sky 2+***

**Rapporteur-general:** Dumitru Fornea (Workers' Group – RO)

**Reference:** COM(2020) 577 final

COM(2020) 579 final

EESC-2020-05081-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

The European Economic and Social Committee values the efforts of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the specialised EU institutions to find new legal and administrative solutions that can ensure the sustainable development of the air transport system for the benefit of all citizens, airspace users and the environment. We all agree that it is necessary to ensure air traffic safety, to improve the overall performance, scalability and resilience of air traffic management and air navigation services, and also we support the aim of the Single European Sky for a coherent pan-European network and a progressively more integrated and technologically modernised air traffic management and air navigation services.

The Single European Sky amended recast proposal presented is an updated regulatory framework that attempts to achieve the original Single European Sky targets on reducing CO2 emissions, reducing delays and improvements in the cost efficiency of the air traffic management service provision. However, even if the Commission's proposal is an improvement compared to the existing regulation, it remains unclear whether the draft is sufficient to achieve the original Single European Sky goals. Therefore, the EESC suggests initiating a discussion to clarify the ambition of the new Single European Sky regulation.

***Contact:*** *Agota Bazsik*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8658 - email:* *Agota.Bazsik@eesc.europa.eu**)*

* ***Railway safety and connectivity concerning the cross-border infrastructure through the Channel Fixed Link***

**Reference:** Category C opinion

COM(2020) 782 final – 2020/0347 COD

EESC-2020-05483-00-00-AC

**Key points:**

The Committee decided to endorse the proposal.

***Contact:*** *Agota Bazsik*

*(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 8658 - email:* *Agota.Bazsik@eesc.europa.eu**)*

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

1. [OJ C 311, 18.9.2020, p. 76](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2020:311:SOM:EN:HTML). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [OJ C 487, 28.12.2016, p. 113](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2016.487.01.0113.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:487:TOC); [OJ C 288, 31.8.2017, p. 56](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2017.288.01.0056.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2017:288:TOC); [OJ C 440, 6.12.2018, p. 145](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52018AE2158); [CCMI/130](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/freeing-eu-asbestos) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)