

Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society

**2021 --TEN WORK PROGRAMME**

**EN**

The TEN Work Programme comes right after the European Council's approval of the European Commission's (EC) proposal to increase the climate ambition for 2030. In the long-term future it means accelerating the green transition and reaching the new goal of a 55% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050. It is an ambitious plan and should keep in mind a socially just and economically justified transition through the European Green Deal in order to "leave nobody behind".

The European Green Deal is a clear priority and core element of the Recovery Plan. The experience of the COVID-19 crisis will almost certainly accelerate momentum towards new ways of working, automation and digitalisation. Indeed, there are high potential financing opportunities in sustainable energy, transport and services of general interest for projects, technologies and market solutions that can bring direct benefits to citizens and local areas.

Building on the previous work of the TEN section, in particular on the information society and media, as well as in line with the objectives of the Security Union, the TEN section envisages work towards internal security.

The dominant theme in 2021 will be the European Union's (EU) recovery and resilience. All the sectors referred to below play a key role in creating a way back to a degree of normality for workers, businesses and citizens.

European initiatives will increasingly be of a cross-cutting nature. Therefore, the TEN section is looking forward to active cooperation with the other sections and the CCMI in order to achieve broad and coherent participation by European organised society in shaping European policy.

Looking at the year ahead with regard to energy, transport and services of general interest, information society and media, the TEN section envisages a noteworthy work programme. It will face a demanding timetable, with new proposals already being released in the last months of 2020 and more to be expected throughout the course of 2021. This will also mean that TEN section members will have several opportunities to put forward the voice of organised civil society from all Member States in shaping the European policies under the current challenging circumstances.

Finally, and as a general remark concerning all TEN section work and the Thematic Study Groups (TSGs) within the TEN section, it must be taken into account that 2020 was severely affected by COVID-19, which triggered an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis all over the world. The pandemic will undoubtedly continue to affect 2021, and therefore the TEN section and its TSGs will adapt their priorities and activities in order to respond to the coronavirus outbreak and mitigate its socio-economic impact in the EU.

**ENERGY**

These are crucial times for the future development of the EU: the health emergency stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic is resulting in huge losses for entire sectors of the economy, while at the same time the challenge posed by climate change means that the EU must continue pursuing the objectives set in the European Green Deal and the digitalisation agenda. The new Multiannual Financial Framework and the NextGenerationEU temporary instrument will provide financial stimulus to sustain the recovery. The European Commission (EC) has presented a very ambitious work programme which, despite being composed of several different proposals for new and refit legislation, should be seen globally in the light of the overarching objective of reaching climate neutrality.

Nevertheless, account must be taken of the financial and social strain on citizens and businesses who have been hit by the crisis, including by unemployment and poverty. Companies with liquidity problems in spring 2020 are now facing a new threat of insolvency. Careful attention must therefore be given to the need to restore markets and ensure social and territorial cohesion when implementing the EC's work programme, giving due consideration to the real impact of the actions taken in the energy sector on the life of citizens and business, in particular SMEs, including identifying new business opportunities, keeping alive jobs under threat and creating new employment. This is also in line with the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency for the next semester, which will focus on a resilient, green, social, digital and global EU. The study group on the *Assessment of National Energy and Climate Plans and State of the Energy Union Report 2020* (TEN/724) will be an opportunity to examine the different perspectives on the topic and their financial sustainability, and to analyse the measures taken and planned by Member States, also through the lens of a just transition.

Tackling energy poverty and protecting vulnerable householdswill remain a priority for the TEN section in close cooperation with the SOC section. The topic is intertwined with the policy area of services of general interest (SGIs) and will be explored by the Study Group on *A* *Renovation wave for Europe* (TEN/723). The initiative envisages a broad range of measures to at least double the annual energy renovation rate of residential and non-residential buildings by 2030, ensuring energy efficiency and affordability and giving impetus to the construction ecosystem and to the creation of jobs in the sector. It will be followed by the revision of the *Energy Efficiency Directive* and of the *Energy Performance of Buildings Directive*, the latter including the phased introduction of mandatory Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) for existing buildings. In relation to this, the TEN section will promote a study on the *Minimum Energy Performance Standards in the residential sector* to assess the introduction of MEPS in different types of buildings, focusing on the impact on consumers in energy poverty and vulnerable situations, and outlining policy recommendations.

With reference to the future organisation of energy systems and infrastructures, the TEN section has repeatedly stressed the importance of the active participation of all consumers – households, businesses and energy communities – in the development of smart energy systems. As highlighted in the EESC's opinion *Between a trans-European super grid and local energy islands* (TEN/706), the issue of the ownership and control of infrastructure should be further clarified in EESC opinions when public investments in infrastructure are discussed, particularly as this involves a considerable amount of public funding.

The EESC recently finalised its opinions on the two complementary EC Communications on an *EU Strategy for energy system integration* (TEN/717) and the *Hydrogen strategy* (TEN/718), which were adopted at the EESC plenary in January.

Many legislative initiatives will follow in the framework of these strategies. At the end of 2020, the EC launched its proposal for the *revision of the TEN-E Regulation guidelines*, which lay down rules for the development and interoperability of trans-European energy infrastructure to ensure the timely implementation of the projects of common interest ("PCIs") which interconnect energy markets. Currently, the TEN section is carefully assessing the proposed new regulation. In connection with the transport field, a *revision of the Directive on the Deployment of Alternative Fuels Infrastructure* will also be carried out, with the aim of ensuring the availability and usability of a dense, wide-spread network of alternative fuels infrastructure throughout the EU, mainly energy storage (dams and electric batteries), natural and hybrid gas and hydrogen.

In relation to the organisation of future energy systems, the role of renewables will also be an important topic for the work of the TEN section in 2021: in fact, the goal of decarbonisation and clean electrification can never be achieved without a significant increase in the share of renewables in the energy mix. The initiative on an *Offshore renewable energy strategy* (TEN/726) and the planned *revision of the Renewable Energy Directive* will present an opportunity to evaluate more deeply the developments in the field and express recommendations on behalf of civil society, including on the role and potential of biofuels.

Turning to gas, new policies and revisions of existing legislation will be developed with the aim of achieving climate neutrality. Methane is in fact the second most important greenhouse gas contributor to climate change and approximately one third of global anthropogenic methane emissions come from the energy sector. During the first months of 2021, the TEN section will take a careful look at the *Methane strategy* (TEN/725). It will be followed by a legislative initiative specifically focused on reducing methane emissions in the energy sector; this will be examined together with the planned revision of the Third Energy Package with regard to the Natural Gas Directive and the Natural Gas Transmission Networks Regulation, which are to be proposed with the aim of regulating competitive decarbonised gas markets.

Last but not least, the effort to achieve climate neutrality will require a cross-cutting and coordinated approach with the other sections and the CCMI, given that many of the initiatives envisaged by the EC touch on different policy fields, as shown by the legislative proposal on *Sustainability requirements for EU batteries*, released in December 2020, which aims to ensure a competitive, circular, sustainable and safe value chain for all batteries placed on the Union market. Other topics of common interest could be the *revision of the Effort Sharing Regulation and of the Energy and Environmental Aid Guideline*. The TEN section will pay attention to the impact of energy consumption and energy efficiency in the field of digitalisation, once it is clear that the deployment of the digital network will be a key factor in the EU recovery.

Likewise, the EESC attaches importance to the upcoming proposal for a review of the Energy Taxation Directive.

The **Thematic Study Group on Energy** **(TSG-E)** will aim to link the EESC's agenda on energy issues to the broader context of EU energy policies and to promote a stronger role for civil society, in order to ensure a successful energy transition which leaves no one behind.

This goal will be achieved by holding expert hearings and public conferences, the participation of members in external events, and also by selecting relevant themes for study and discussion, giving a cross-cutting and forward-looking contribution to the TEN section's work and possibly also resulting in proposals for own-initiative projects.

To launch such a dialogue in the upcoming year, the members of the TSG-E will conduct a deeper analysis of the main and interconnected issues at stake in the EC's work programme for 2021, which is expected to include a broad range of legislative initiatives impacting, directly or indirectly, on the energy field. This overview, linked with the fruitful insights coming from the TSG-E members' expertise, will provide the basis to build a focus on specific topics for forthcoming work. Possible themes might be, for example: the need to tackle energy poverty, including through the introduction of common standards and adequate infrastructures; the role of renewables in the future energy systems, with regard to the foreseen *revision of the Renewable Energy Directive*; the impact of the decarbonisation process in the energy sector at the regional and local level; and the promotion of an active role for citizens in this transition, not least with regard to energy communities.

**TRANSPORT**

In its Work Programme for 2021 the EC sets out its approach to the transport sector in the context of the European Green Deal, with focus on revamping the relevant climate legislation. The emphasis of the work planned across the European Green Deal reflects the systemic nature of the green transition also envisaged for the transport sector. In this regard, the TEN section will pay particular attention to the measures that the EC will put forward on smart and sustainable mobility, including a *revision of the Regulation on the trans-European transport network* and of the *Directive on intelligent transport systems*, as well as the *EU 2021 Rail Corridor Initiative*, including the *revision of the Rail Freight Corridor Regulation and actions to boost passenger rail*.

Furthermore, following the EC's Communication on its new Strategy on Sustainable and Smart Mobility, which will serve as a roadmap for the next years and establishes a strategy towards a transport sector based on a fully implemented Internal Market, fit for a clean, digital and modern economy on the 2030 and 2050 horizons, the TEN section will contribute with an opinion (TEN/729). The TEN section will closely follow this subject with a view to increasing the sustainability of transport.

Due to the new pandemic situation, the challenges stemming from the COVID-19 crisis will play a role and be addressed in the strategy as well, as the transport sector is one of the hardest hit by the crisis (supply chain disruptions, steep travel and tourism reductions, reduced connectivity). This strategy considers the restoration of a reinforced Single Market built on a sustainable, smart and resilient transport system as the key to the sector's capacity to bounce back from the crisis and ensure its resilience to possible future crises.

Key elements include adequate resources for EU funding programmes, development of digitalisation, adequate resources and improved steering systems to complete the TEN-T on time, fleet renewal in all transport modes, and the accelerated completion of the Single European Transport Area with removal of the remaining obstacles to free service provision.

The TEN section will follow and monitor closely all the initiatives contained in this strategy since they may be referred to the EESC for consultation in the following eight areas of action:

* Boosting the uptake of cleaner technologies and alternative fuels for road, maritime and aviation;
* Increasing the share of more sustainable transport modes such as rail and inland waterways, and improving efficiency across the whole transport system;
* Incentivising the right consumer choices and low-emission practices;
* Investing in low- and zero-emissions solutions, including infrastructure;
* Implementation of the TEN-T;
* Development of intelligent transport systems, including multimodal ticketing;
* Re-building passenger confidence and market demand;
* Strategies for making public transport more attractive and expanding it.

With the aim of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050, the TEN section will closely follow the EC's initiatives, seeking to ensure that sustainable and smart transport go hand in hand, taking full advantage of the opportunities presented by digitalisation and automation – for instance, by increasing traffic efficiency through Artificial Intelligence, or reducing traffic hazards to a minimum. They are the key to cleaner, seamless, smart and safe mobility across all transport modes. The TEN section will address the planned initiative on the *revision of the Directive on Intelligent Transport Systems*, including a multimodal ticketing initiative.

Taking into consideration the different modes of transport, the TEN section will take a closer look at the needs at aviation level to get the whole sector back on track after the stand-still caused by the COVID-19 crisis, paying particular attention to the *ReFuelEU Aviation legislative initiatives package*, *the revision of the Renewable Energy Directive*, the completion of the *Single European Sky*, the *revision of the EU ETS*, the *implementation of CORSIA in the EU* and the ongoing *revisions of Air Passenger Rights* and *the Airport Charges Directive*.

In the maritime sector, the TEN section will follow the *FuelEU Maritime legislative initiatives package*, having in mind the need for solutions to improve existing fleets and the next generation of fleets in order to achieve lower energy consumption and the use of cleaner energy.

In road transport, the TEN section will focus on the EC initiatives for a coordinated approach on legislation to achieve progress in both infrastructure and vehicles, with a particular focus on heavy duty vehicles, as well as on the *revision of the framework for infrastructure for sustainable alternative fuels*, in order to incentivise the deployment of vehicles supporting the development of multimodal transport.

Regarding rail, the TEN section will focus on the planned *Rail Corridor initiative*, including the *revision of the Rail Freight Corridor Regulation and actions to boost passenger rail*.

The TEN section will also focus on the *proposal for a revision of the Regulation on the Trans-European Transport Network* (TEN-T).

The TEN section also takes note of the intention of the EC to assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on connectivity and competition in the Internal Market for the transport sector and to propose follow-up measures, and to prepare crisis contingency plan(s), both on the horizon 2021-2023.

In rail transport, the *2021 European Year of Rail* will be highlighted, with a particular focus on the areas of freight transport, through-ticketing and modal shift. This topic shall be developed in cooperation with the CCMI.

In line with the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU and upon its specific request, the TEN section has been asked to prepare an exploratory opinion on the *Single European Railway Area*, TEN/727, to be adopted at the EESC plenary session in March.

Building on this and previous work, the TEN section will organise, at the end of the first semester, a high-level event on this topic.

The **Thematic Study Group on Transport (TSG-T)** will continue to act as an internal think tank to the TEN Section on transport issues.

A core element in the work of the TSG-T will be to anticipate new challenges and develop and review new ideas and concepts, especially working conditions and a socially just transition.

Both the EC and Council priorities for 2021 seem to focus on combining recovery from the COVID-19 crisis with implementing the two major priorities of implementing the European Green Deal and digitalisation, at the same time seeking synergies between these objectives.

Significant EC initiatives relevant to the transport sector include the "*Fit for 55*" package with measures to implement the enhanced emission reduction objectives for 2030. The measures affecting transport are a *revision of the EU Emission Trading system* (ETS), extending it to *maritime transport and reviewing the aviation ETS system in the light of the ICAO* (International Civil Aviation Organization) *CORSIA* (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme in International Aviation) *system* and *a review of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Directives*.

Also, initiatives in other sectors may be of interest to the transport sector such as the planned *proposal for a trusted and secure European e-ID* and the follow up on the *White Paper on foreign subsidies*.

Against this backdrop the following themes appear particularly interesting:

* Extension of the EU ETS to maritime transport and the revision of the EU ETS for aviation, including the coexistence of CORSIA in the European Union, ensuring that any regulation it proposes effectively serves environmental goals while also preserving undistorted competition in the EU's Single Aviation Market and the EU shipping sector. There has been talk about extending the system to land transport although this does not appear in the EC Work Programme 2021.
* The planned review of ITS and multimodal ticketing. This theme could be wide-ranging and include AI applications to transport.
* *The review of the TEN-T Regulation*, given the serious criticism of TEN-T implementation by the EU Court of Auditors, focusing on problems with implementation of cross-border links, insufficient coordination between Member States and general problems of guidance.
* *The Rail corridors initiative* hinges on the essential issue of rail freight efficiency, which also has a bearing on prospects for multimodality, highly topical in view of the clear link with the *2021 Year of Rail*.

Attention should also be drawn to the Council's request for the EC to present a proposal for a contingency plan for the European freight transport sector in the event of pandemics or other major crises.

The TSG-T will endeavour to further develop cooperation with other institutions, namely the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the EC (DG MOVE), the European Parliament (TRAN Committee) and the Committee of the Regions.

**SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST**

The TEN section will continue to engage in work to rebuild a society based on the benefits of services of general interest (SGIs). Although it is still difficult at the end of 2020 to gauge the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in every area of life, the crisis has revealed the need for effective services of general interest (SGIs) and services of general economic interest (SGEIs).

In order to counter possible market failures in services of general economic interest, Protocol 26 on SGIs appended to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) calls on Member States to ensure "a high level of quality, safety and affordability, equal treatment and the promotion of universal access and of user rights". However, in some Member States, a number of SGEIs fail to meet, or to meet in full, the criteria set out in the protocol.

In order to ensure high quality and state-of-the-art access for all, it will be necessary to:

* review and adapt the universal service obligations adopted at European level to technological and social developments;
* review the European quality standards of the various SGEIs;
* require Member States to establish universal access indicators for each SGEI (density of access points and maximum distance to them, service regularity, etc.);
* specify the concept of affordable prices to ensure the financial accessibility of SGEIs;
* design a Community methodology for assessing the performance of SGEIs.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that there is a pressing need for services of general interest that meet the criteria set out in Protocol 26, particularly for those stipulated in the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), such as health and social services, digital communications, transport, energy, financial services, water, sanitation and refuse collection. In line with the upcoming Portuguese Presidency, which considers the implementation of the EPSR as one of its priorities, the TEN section will pursue its work on the EPSR, especially regarding the provision of housing assistance of good quality for those in need and the right to access essential services of good quality. The Green Deal's buildings plan and the European Pillar of Social Rights should be used as an opportunity, with due regard for the policies and practices of the Member States- to give concrete and clear form to the EU's housing policies.

Following the adoption of its own-initiative opinion on *Universal access to housing that is decent, sustainable and affordable over the long term* (TEN/707) and the successful webinar on the topic in September 2020, the TEN section will focus on the Commission's new strategy to boost renovation of both public and private buildings. The EC's Communication on *A Renovation Wave for Europe – greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives*, (TEN/723), proposes an EU-level cross-sectoral partnership on social and affordable housing – the so-called *Affordable Housing Initiative* – to guarantee that local renovation projects have access to all the necessary technical capacity and EU funds. In this context, the TEN section will organise a high-level roundtable at its meeting in February to discuss the *Renovation Wave initiative*, which will open up numerous possibilities and generate far-reaching social, environmental and economic benefits. On 18 January, the EC launched the design phase of the New European Bauhaus Initiative, announced by President von der Leyen in her 2020 State of the Union address. The TEN section will integrate in its work this environmental, economic and cultural project, which aims to combine design, sustainability, accessibility, affordability and investment with a view to delivering the European Green Deal. The TEN section will also carry out a study on *Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) in the residential sector* in order to assess the introduction of MEPS in different types of buildings, with the focus on the residential sector, and the impact on consumers experiencing energy poverty or in a vulnerable situation. Following up on its *Renovation Wave initiative* for the building sector, in 2021, the EC will revise the *Energy Performance of Buildings Directive*, including an impact assessment, which will be an important topic for the work of the TEN section in 2021.

Following these opinions and projects in relation to affordable housing and the Renovation Wave Strategy, the TEN section, in cooperation with other sections (SOC, etc.) envisages organising, during the second semester, an event with officials and high-level stakeholders from economic, social, consumers' and citizens' organisations.

Among the REFIT initiatives, the EC intends to evaluate the State aid rules for health and social services of general economic interest. The TEN section will closely follow this evaluation, which aims to verify the extent to which the rules on health and social services of general economic interest have achieved the objectives envisaged under the 2012 SGEI package.

The TEN section will closely follow the upcoming EC roadmap regarding connectivity, skills and digital public services, which will clearly define goals for 2030 in the framework of a non-legislative initiative on *"Europe’s digital decade: 2030 digital targets"*.

The **Thematic Study Group on Services of General Interest** (TSG-SGI) will continue to encourage the relevant European and national authorities to guarantee the right of access to high-quality services in the context of sustainable development and social cohesion in tune with the motto of the TSG-SGI Work Programme 2020 – 2023: "Services of General Interest which work for people".

The TSG-SGI will follow up on the implementation of the EPSR and the clarification of the 20th principle of the Pillar, which covers essential services and their effective delivery, especially by civil society organisations. Furthermore, the TSG-SGI will deal with the digitalisation of SGIs and with the role of cities and municipalities in achieving climate targets and a socially just transition.

In so doing, the TSG-SGI will pursue the involvement of civil society representatives in its work by holding expert hearings, public conferences and debates. For example, a common event with the representatives of municipalities and universities involved in the Horizon 2020 – CoSIE project on co-creation of public services by citizens and civil society organisations could be organised at the EESC premises (planned for spring 2021).

The TSG-SGI will work on the role of SGIs in tackling the health crisis and ensuring social cohesion in society. In particular, the TSG-SGI will assess the conclusions of the evaluation of the services of general economic interest (SGEI) rules applicable to health and social services and the SGEI De Minimis Regulation for all sectors, which will be carried out by the EC and published around mid-2021 in a Staff Working Document.

**INFORMATION SOCIETY AND MEDIA**

The TEN Work Programme on information society and media addresses the changes brought by the new wave of technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), that have affected the media and the internet environment and is linked with *Security of Network and Information Systems* (TEN/730) and *Media and Audiovisual Action Plan* (TEN/731). The COVID-19 pandemic has opened new avenues for cyber-criminals and has rendered people more susceptible to violent extremist discourses online. It has further showed the need to protect, in both the physical and digital environment.

The new way forward on internal security as part of the Security Union Strategy replaces the previous security strategy set out in the [European Agenda on Security](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu_agenda_on_security_en.pdf). Security is a cross-cutting issue which goes into almost every sphere of life and affects a multitude of policy areas.

Building on the previous work of the EC, the Council and the Parliament, the TEN section will work on the Security Union Strategy to put citizens at the centre of the approach, and focus on three priority areas:

* fighting organised crime and human trafficking,
* countering terrorism and radicalisation,
* fighting cybercrime.

The TEN section has fully endorsed the deployment of 5G networks and the launch of commercial services in Europe. 5G networks comprise all relevant network infrastructure for mobile and wireless communications technology used for connectivity and value-added services with advanced performance characteristics such as very high data rates and capacity, low-latency communications, ultra-high reliability and support for a high number of connected devices. The issue of digital network security will remain central, as any disruption of 5G would have particularly serious consequences for many critical services. A coordinated and consistent approach to cybersecurity in the EU for critical technologies and networks is therefore essential, especially at a time when cyberattacks are engineered by a wide range of threat actors.

The forthcoming EC's renewed cybersecurity strategy includes a review of the *Directive on the Security of Network and Information Systems* (the NIS Directive). This directive has increased EU national cybersecurity capabilities, requiring Member States to frame a national cybersecurity strategy, to establish National Computer Emergency Response Teams (CSIRTs) and to appoint authorities competent to deal with NIS issues. In line with the provisions of the Directive, the EC has decided to review the functioning of this Directive and, at the same time, will also propose additional measures on critical infrastructure protection.

The legislative proposals adopted by the EC will therefore shape TEN activity with regard to digital matters, and taking due account of civil society input will be very important.

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) deals with all audiovisual media, both traditional TV broadcasts and on-demand services. The content and media sector plays a key economic, social and cultural role in Europe. The development of online/digital publications concerns all sub-sectors of the publishing industry. Recently it has been possible for all media content, through images, sound or written words to be distributed and accessed in a variety of ways and EU policies need to evolve to reflect this new situation. In the audiovisual field the European Union needs to guarantee a single European market for audiovisual media services.

The TEN section's activities will also include work on the new media and audiovisual action plan proposed by the EC.

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