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Brussels, 15 September 2021

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| **562ST PLENARY SESSION  7 AND 8 JULY 2021  SUMMARY OF OPINIONS ADOPTED** |
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# **ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION**

* ***Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A New Agenda for the Mediterranean***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Helena DE FELIPE LEHTONEN (Employers' Group – ES) |
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| **Reference:** | JOIN(2021) 2 final  EESC-2021-01801-00-01-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* The EESC applauds the Communication's renewed commitment to the rule of law, human and fundamental rights, equality, democracy and good governance as a cornerstone for the development of equitable, inclusive and therefore prosperous societies in our Southern Neighbourhood, as well as its particular focus on young people, women and disadvantaged groups. At the same time, it welcomes the new social objectives of the Porto Summit, which must have an impact in the implementation of the Joint Communication.
* The EESC is very pleased to note the EU's commitment to promote a culture of rule of law by closely involving civil society and the business community. Civil society organisations (CSOs) and social partner organisations remain key partners in shaping and monitoring EU cooperation. The Committee therefore considers it crucial that the EU support and promote the action of the different institutions and networks of CSOs in the broad sense of the term at Euro-Mediterranean level so that they can carry out their work in the best possible conditions.
* The EESC warmly welcomes the proposals to involve the private sector more closely in the development of the region to supplement the necessary public investment, and to deepen public-private dialogue with a view to ensuring social and economic sustainability, which will lead to the creation of decent jobs. This approach should be promoted both at the regional Euromed level and at national and local levels.
* The EESC believes it is important to improve regional, sub-regional and inter-regional cooperation. It welcomes the decisive support for strengthening cooperation in multilateral fora, with the UN at its centre, in particular on peace and security. The Committee calls for action based on synergies between the instruments provided by the UN Charter and the EU Security Union Strategy and believes that a significant increase in the EU's efforts in the region is needed. A good example of the good governance approach in the region is a clear focus on supporting the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) as a forum for exchange and cooperation.
* The EESC stresses that the focus must be on tackling the root causes of migration in the respective partner countries, so that people do not migrate due to a lack of life chances. Examples of this would be better access to education or measures to create quality jobs. The EESC calls on the EU to ensure that the green transition is not perceived as a model imposed from the outside.
* The EESC considers that gender equality is not only a universally recognised human right but also an imperative to well-being, economic growth, prosperity, good governance, peace and security; we must step up our efforts, including through gender mainstreaming in all cooperation programmes and target actions, in line with the EU's third Gender Action Plan.

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* ***Trade Policy Review - An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Timo VUORI (Employers' Group – FI) |
| **Co-rapporteur:** | Christophe QUAREZ (Workers' Group – FR) |
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| **Reference:** | COM(2021) 66 final  EESC-2021-02032-00-01-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) welcomes the new EU trade policy strategy. It is time to update the trade tools, analysing and quantifying trade changes, differentiating temporary and COVID-19-related changes from permanent changes.
* The EESC supports an "Open, Strategic and Assertive" trade policy to improve market access and level the playing field. In practice, it must drive sustainable growth, competitiveness, decent jobs and better consumer choices via a sound mix of external and internal policies. Trade is only one part of solution.
* Modernising the World Trade Organization (WTO) is the top priority to deliver a modern trade agenda with environmental and social issues (breaking down taboos). The EU should take the lead forming strategic cooperation with key partners and promoting better multilateral trade regimes and standards.
* The EESC welcomes the focus on sustainability, and the Paris Agreement becoming an essential element of future trade and investment agreements. This should be extended to International Labour Organization (ILO) core conventions.
* The upcoming trade and sustainable development (TSD) Review is an integral part of the EU trade strategy. The EESC calls for an ambitious strengthening of TSD chapters and their effective enforceability in EU bilateral trade and investment agreements.
* Strengthening sustainability and resilience in global value chains (GVCs) is essential to level the playing field. The EU needs instruments against corruption and environmental, labour, social and human rights infringements like mandatory due diligence, new UN treaty on business and human rights, ILO convention on decent work in global supply chains, or sustainability in public procurements. Learning the lessons of the COVID-19 crisis, the EU needs a deeper grasp of GVCs' impact on people and businesses, as well as their vulnerabilities. Diversification is a tool for greater resilience, with proper monitoring mechanisms and adequate public procurement processes.
* Where the WTO cannot act or fully deliver, the EU should count on wide range of FTAs that reflect EU values and international standards with leading and emerging economies in international trade. There is room for more on that front.
* The EESC stresses the need to boost cooperation with civil society, from shaping to monitoring trade tools and agreements, as well at its visibility: reinstating the expert group on free trade agreements (FTAs) and strengthening Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs). Meaningful engagement with the European Parliament and civil society, notably via the EESC, to better address concerns would help ensure smoother ratification processes.
* The EESC welcomes concrete actions to implement, advance and ensure effective implementation of existing EU FTAs. The Chief Trade Enforcement Officer should boost the consistency of implementation and enforcement of EU and WTO agreements, including TSD chapters.
* The EESC welcomes the EU being assertive in defending EU values and trade commitments unilaterally where all other options fail. It should also factor in all possible political and economic fallouts of such decisions.
* The EESC supports the EU's continued use of Aid for Trade to help developing countries implement trade agreements and support compliance with rules and standards, in particular related to sustainable development.
* The EESC stresses the need to guarantee a level playing field for agriculture. European agricultural products should have better market access to third countries and mutually imported products from third countries must meet the European standards on sustainability and food safety. The EU FTAs must respect EU sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) provisions and adhere to the precautionary principle.
* The EESC welcomes the special focus on small and medium size companies (SMEs) at all levels. It reiterates its call for greater efforts to communicate the impact of international trade on businesses and people.

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* ***NextGenerationEU funding strategy***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Judith VORBACH (Workers' Group – AT) |
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| **Reference:** | COM(2021) 250 final |
| EESC-2021-02011-00-00-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* welcomes the fact that the Own Resources Decision (ORD entered into force on 1 June 2021, enabling the Commission to start borrowing resources for the NextGenerationEU recovery instrument;
* finds that a well-functioning funding strategy is key for the smooth implementation of NextGenerationEU (NGEU);
* highlights that sound and sustainable funding and solid risk management are in the very interest of everyone. Moreover, borrowing and debt management has to be based on democratic control, legitimacy and transparency;
* stresses how important it is that the Commission manage the funding strategy directly and not outsource this and it welcomes the Commission's increase in its human resources in this domain;
* finds that an advisory board should be established, on which the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, social partners and organised civil society are represented;
* stresses the importance of preserving the EU's high creditworthiness and low borrowing costs in order to avoid redistributive effects from borrowers to lenders;
* welcomes that one precondition for participation in the Primary Dealer Network (PDN) is supervision by a competent authority of the Union;
* supports the establishment of solid risk-management systems and the holding of the 'NGEU account' with the ECB. The Chief Risk Officer (CRO) should consult the European Parliament and the Council when drawing up the High-Level Risk and Compliance Policy;
* welcomes the planned 'NGEU Green Bond framework' and proposes that the issuance of NGEU social bonds be considered.

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# **EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP**

* ***Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (Diversity Europe – EL) |
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| **Reference:** | COM(2021) 101 final  EESC-2021-01644-00-00-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC welcomes the new EU Disability Rights Strategy, acknowledging that it is a clear step forward compared with the previous one. It is however concerned about the lack of binding measures and hard legislation implementing the Strategy.

The EESC:

* calls for full involvement and participation of organisations of persons with disabilities (DPOs) in the proposed Disability Platform. The EESC should also be invited to take part;
* thinks the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) should strongly linked to the Disability Strategy by using it to help persons with disabilities (PWD) recover from the pandemic;
* welcomes the proposal for AccessibleEU, but calls for clear and transparent plans on how to fund and staff this agency, and how it will make sure that PWD are represented;
* strongly endorses the flagship initiative on the EU Disability Card calling for it to be implemented by means of a regulation;
* regrets the lack of specific actions addressing the needs of women and girls with disabilities and calls for a specific flagship initiative in the second half of the period of the Strategy.
* considers essential that PWD are not denied access to justice due to legal incapacitation or accessibility issues, lack of support in decision-making or a lack of availability of assistance for communication;
* calls for the guidelines on improvements in independent living and inclusion in the community to include clear definitions based on those established by the European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care, as well as CRPD General Comment 5 on Article 19;
* recommends to include indicators on the disability employment gap in the Social Pillar's new Social Scoreboard, and adopt targets that aim to the elimination of any employment gap, with a focus on quality employment in the open labour market;
* underlines the need to ensure more systematic collection of disaggregated data, possibly with the use of the Washington Group's Short Set of Questions;
* calls for the EC to include PWD and DPOs in all areas of the Conference on the Future of Europe, not just those relating specifically to disability;
* recommends that the EU candidate for the CRPD Committee be a European woman with a disability.
* calls on the Council to join the Disability Platform, and to swiftly appoint a disability coordinator as provided for in the Strategy.
* calls on the disability movement to be proactive and to push for each and every action of this Strategy to deliver on what it promises.

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* ***EU strategy on the rights of the child / European child guarantee***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Kinga JOÓ (Diversity Europe – HU) |
| **Co-rapporteur:** | Maria del Carmen BARRERA CHAMORRO (Workers' Group – ES) |
| **Reference:** | COM(2021) 137 final - 2021/0070 NLE  COM(2021) 142 final  EESC-2021-01883-00-01-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* welcomes both the Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the Child Guarantee, and considers that their implementation will help support efforts at European and national level aimed at promoting children's well-being and reducing child poverty;
* believes that breaking the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage requires a coordinated European approach based on strong policy and legal frameworks; underlines the need to mainstream children's rights into policy-making;
* points at the need to support parents and carers via a variety of actions, amongst which adequate income and work-life balance; considers that addressing the vulnerability of a child requires addressing the vulnerability of their family; investment in children and their families should be a priority, whilst providing high quality support to assist families in raising children through positive parenting skills;
* calls for the consultation and involvement of organised civil society, children's and family organisations, amongst other stakeholders, in the drafting of national action plans and their monitoring mechanisms; national action plans should include transparent data on the use of EU and national funds, as well as a timeline of activities;
* recommends all Member States to earmark ESF+ funding for lifting children out of poverty, with the designated 5% taken as a minimum; furthermore, they should grant free access to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities and healthcare or grant these free of charge;
* points at the need for capacity-building for both children and adults, including through non-formal activities provided by civil society actors, in order to support children's participation and make their voices and claims heard;
* considers that integrated child protection systems proposed by the strategy should be complemented by measures preventing all forms of violence against children; points at the need of a plan involving all levels of government aimed at addressing and preventing violence against children;
* welcomes the focus on child poverty, deprivation, discrimination and exclusion under the Child Guarantee and encourages Member States to present qualitative and quantitative targets in their Child Guarantee Action Plans;
* considers that addressing child and family poverty under the Child Guarantee also includes addressing digital deprivation; welcomes the proposal for Child Guarantee National Coordinators, who will coordinate and monitor the Guarantee's implementation.

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* ***Adult learning***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Tatjana BABRAUSKIENĖ (Workers' Group – LT) |
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| **Reference:** | Exploratory opinion at the request of the Slovenian Presidency  EESC-2021-02708-00-00-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* welcomes the recent Commission initiatives' focus on adult learning, training and skills development; points at the importance of investing in adult learning and skills development for the economic recovery in view of the pandemic and for a social Europe;
* underlines the role of adult learning to help adults improve and acquire citizenship skills and to be more active in society; considers that lifelong learning should become a lifestyle for all and a reality at the workplace; calls on the Commission and the Member States to achieve and raise the target of 60% of adult learning participation per year;
* recommends Member States to strengthen the policy, governance and funding to adult learning and to step up the implementation of the Council recommendation on upskilling pathways (2016); they should ensure equal access to lifelong learning for all adults, including those hailing from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds; teachers need to be provided with training on how to adapt lessons and online learning to make these accessible for all learners with disabilities and learning difficulties;
* points at the need for better access to guidance and counselling so that all adults are informed on lifelong learning possibilities; all adults and workers should have the right, amongst others, to quality employment training and the validation of informal and non-formal learning; considers that social dialogue and interaction between trade unions and employers are crucial to align training with labour market needs, ensure training quality and to finance training; points at the need for Member States to set up, with the involvement of social partners, financial mechanisms and tools to facilitate access to learning and training;
* considers that companies, together with trade unions, should be involved as much as possible in establishing strategies for skills development for the digital and green transitions of industries; emphasises that both upskilling and reskilling are crucial in these transitions, and that companies require support for their upskilling and reskilling strategies; encourages Member States to ensure amongst others that employee training programmes and curricula have clear learning outcomes and key competences;
* calls on the Commission to re-establish open methods of coordination between EU Member States' ministries working on adult learning, social partners and civil society as part of a working group, so as to continue with the work that has been carried out by previous adult learning working groups.

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* ***The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Carlos Manuel TRINDADE (Workers' group – PT) |
| **Co-rapporteur:** | Cristian PÎRVULESCU (Diversity Europe – RO) |
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| **Reference:** | EESC-2021-01689-00-01-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* welcomes the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights and its implementation at EU and national level, with due regard for respective competences, and considers it very timely, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted every aspect of human life, worsening pre-existing social issues, and put tremendous pressure on state institutions, communities, organisations and businesses alike;
* welcomes the political consensus built around the Plan during the Social Summit in Porto with the Porto Commitment;
* acknowledges the diversity and the common basis of social models across the EU;
* believes that guaranteeing minimum social standards for every person living in the EU is of the utmost importance for building a fair and inclusive society;
* states that competitiveness and higher productivity based on skills and knowledge are a sound recipe for maintaining the well-being of European societies;
* considers that specific objectives and targets should be set for all of the 20 principles of the Pillar;
* proposes that in order to make the planned mid-term review more effective, intermediate objectives and targets for this Plan for 2025 may be defined by the Member states in a constructive dialogue with social partners, so that progress in the first half of its implementation can be assessed;
* suggests that as European coordination mechanism for the application of the Plan the framework of the European semester should be used;
* considers that the European Semester is the appropriate framework for the monitoring of the Plan;
* believes that greater efforts can be made at EU and Member State level in the area of combating poverty, in line with the first Sustainable Development Goal under the UN 2030 Agenda;
* proposes that the Plan should include measures leading to address income inequality, given the well-defined priority of social cohesion, as an essential part of the European social model;
* considers that the Plan should promote not only the creation of new jobs – a justified objective – but also the quality of employment, including combating precarious work;
* welcomes the intention to reduce the disparities between men and women in employment and pay in a decade and the intention to increase – although this increase has not yet been quantified – the provision of early childhood education and care.

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

* **Intermodal transport and multimodal logistics**

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| **Rapporteur:** | Stefan BACK (Employers' Group – SE) |
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| **Reference:** | Own-initiative opinion |
| EESC-2021-02457-00-00-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* A long-term viable solution to developing efficient and sustainable multimodal transport and logistics can only be achieved by dealing with the problems that make multimodal transport more expensive, slower and less reliable than, in particular, unimodal road transport. It cannot be built with financial promotion or regulatory support. This kind of approach would also be resource-efficient from a regulatory point of view, since no dedicated regulatory framework would be needed.
* To improve multimodal traffic, the EESC also recommends, in addition to technical innovation and solution of competitiveness problems, full internalisation of external costs for all transport modes to achieve a level playing field. The EESC calls for serious measures to safeguard and/or relaunch a European single wagon load system, link of strategic infrastructure (e.g. ports) to rail solutions, investment in industrial sidings, and involvement of large logistics companies in a modal reorientation of their flows. In order to ensure fair competition between transport modes, the EESC recommends socially exemplary behaviour by all transport modes to ensure high‑quality transport services, high-quality jobs and good social conditions with a view to achieving a level playing field for all market players. Current problems relating to multimodal transport are - apart from additional costs due to transhipment and additional transaction costs - disadvantages such as long delivery times, complexity, higher risk and lower reliability, which make it more difficult for multimodality to take off. Therefore, measures are needed to make multimodal freight transport competitive in its own right and achieve efficient and seamless multimodal freight transport flows at the same cost as unimodal transport.
* There is also a need for rail to adapt better to an open market context and remedy problems due to lack of punctuality, reliability, predictability and flexibility, which have a negative impact on multimodal solutions involving rail. Regarding inland waterway transport, improvements seem to be needed with respect to cross‑border transport capacity. Adequate terminal infrastructure is key to successful intermodality. As a matter of resource efficiency, it would also be useful for Member States to agree to collaborate on the planning of terminal infrastructure in border regions. Distance between terminals should be adapted to demand, density of the network and other local conditions.
* With regard to public debt, the EESC recommends that public investment in intermodal infrastructure be exempt from the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) beyond the COVID-19 crisis.
* A number of the problems hampering intermodal transport could be resolved by smart digital solutions such as track and tracing possibilities and other digital solutions facilitating the effective management of multimodal transport flows.
* The EESC calls on the European Commission to consider the above suggestions when drafting its upcoming review of the regulatory framework for intermodal transport and to enable multimodal transport to play its full part in the transport system, without dedicated support measures.

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# **SINGLE MARKET, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION**

* ***2030 Digital Targets***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Gonçalo LOBO XAVIER (Employers' Group – PT) |
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| **Reference:** | COM(2021) 118 final  EESC-2021-01530-00-01-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* welcomes this initiative and the aim of using digital technologies to improve citizens' lives, while safeguarding fundamental rights and ensuring everyone's health, safety and privacy;
* stresses the need to improve cybersecurity and cyber-resilience and to provide citizens with better choice and control over their data;
* highlights the importance of helping those who cannot benefit immediately from the digitalisation process and calls on the Commission to support those who are in a transition process;
* believes that in order to reduce gaps, investment in infrastructure must go hand in hand with investment in training and lifelong learning;
* considers it essential to drive the digitalisation of education systems by updating educational content for the digital era and to create public-private ecosystems to implement new methodologies of education;
* believes that the EU must ensure that all workers have access to social protection and that social dialogue on potential job losses resulting from technological changes should be promoted;
* stresses that one of the priorities must be the creation of a European fund, supported mainly by taxing the biggest technology companies, with the aim of benefiting workers who lose their jobs due to the digitalisation of the economy;
* calls for a coordinated policy suited to addressing technological and societal changes, with an industrial strategy that also includes competition policy and sector-specific regulation, in particular for secure connectivity.

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* ***Review of the Roaming Regulation***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Christophe LEFÈVRE (Workers' Group – FR) |
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| **Reference:** | COM(2021) 85 final - 2021/0045 (COD)  EESC-2021-01368-00-00-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* recommends requiring the operator to alert the consumer again whenever the volume set for the first alert has been consumed again;
* feels that special attention should be paid to situations where mobile devices are used in cross-border areas with non-EU countries;
* recommends that both the strategy for optical fibre-based broadband coverage and the capacity for broadband provision, be it in a local loop or mobile network, be strengthened significantly;
* recommends that the EU regulation be implemented with the ultimate aim of making the European Union a single tariff zone, in a single market, offering calls and data consumption at "local" rates to all mobile phones and landlines of customers who have a telephone subscription in Europe; and
* is concerned by the proposal to change the way of revising maximum wholesale charges by means of a delegated act and recommends a comprehensive legislative review with regard to the societal aspects of the development of roaming.

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* ***Economic and social opportunities of digitalisation***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Antje GERSTEIN (Employers' Group – DE) |
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| **Reference:** | Exploratory opinion requested by the presidency of the Council of the EU  EESC-2021-02564-00-00-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* stresses the need to strengthen capacities in areas such as cloud computing, 5G, and the secure use of data and to invest in a strong digital Europe;
* is of the opinion that one of the keys to the success of a digital single market will be regulation of new digital business models and applications, as well as access to innovation funding so that SMEs can benefit from the advantages of such new digital applications;
* is convinced that the digital business models which will increasingly shape our world of work need to be designed in a people-oriented way and must guarantee the digital inclusion of particularly vulnerable groups;
* believes that the European Commission needs to take a coordinating role in order to avoid fragmentation between different European funds and make sure that activities and projects in the field of digital transformation for SMEs are streamlined;
* stresses that in some branches, particularly in the service sector, there is an urgent need for a regulatory framework to combat disinformation in the digital space;
* advocates a "human-in-command" approach to AI and draws attention to the impact of AI on jobs, the importance of finding the right balance between regulation, self-regulation and ethical guidance, and the impact of AI on consumers and workers.

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* ***Digitalisation for all***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Philip VON BROCKDORFF (Workers' Group – MT) |
| **Co-rapporteur:** | Violeta JELIĆ (Employers' Group – HR) |
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| **Reference:** | Exploratory opinion requested by the presidency of the Council of the EU  EESC-2021-02647-00-00-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* recommends that in pursuing inclusivity, governments put in place comprehensive strategies, supporting measures and legislation that is adequate and proportionate, to ensure the interoperability, quality, human-centricity, transparency, security, safety and the accessibility of digital public services and products, as well as optimal access to health, education and economic and cultural opportunities;
* recognises that digitalisation can provide both opportunities and threats for businesses and governments should provide adequate financial support, including through EU funds to businesses of all sizes, especially SMEs;
* recommends that work practices such as remote working be implemented with full consideration for work-life balance;
* recommends that Member States work more closely together on the development and validation of digital solutions, leading to a network for sharing best practices;
* recommends an EU-wide review of government policies and measures to engage the relevant stakeholders in proposing effective measures based on social justice;
* recommends strengthening the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA), as a pre-condition for a digital transformation that is trustworthy and where consumers can make choices in a truly open and competitive market;
* emphasises that equity and social dialogue should always be the guiding principles for implementing digital and green technologies.

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

* ***New EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Dimitris DIMITRIADIS (Employers' Group – EL) |
| **Co-rapporteur:** | Kęstutis KUPŠYS (Diversity Europe Group – LT) |
|  | |
| **Reference:** | COM(2021) 82 final  EESC-2021-01138-00-02-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* Adoption of the [EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0082) is strongly supported by the European Economic and Social Committee as a crucial step towards the European Green Deal (EGD) target of climate neutrality and resilience by 2050.
* The risk of economic damage and loss of life due to the increased frequency and intensity of climate-related extreme weather effects will continue. Equally important is the risk that both climate change impacts and the climate adaptation effort may exacerbate existing inequalities.
* Implementation of the Strategy, as well as the European Green Deal, should be based on a systemic approach. The Committee calls for "equal emphasis" on financing mitigation and adaptation.
* The EESC sees the need for specific adaptation guidelines, targets and monitoring tools, benchmarks and indicators to help provide transparency around resource allocation, anticipate and manage climate change impacts, and assess the progress of climate adaptation, while building local, national and regional capacity for using all of these tools.
* The EESC sees nature-based solutions, the bioeconomy and the transition to a circular economy as essential climate adaptation approaches and, at the same time, as an opportunity for the EU to recover in an environmentally and socially sustainable way.
* The Committee calls on the Commission to seek better alignment of climate adaptation policies with climate justice in future adaptation policy work. The Committee acknowledges that climate change can have differing social, economic, public health and other adverse impacts on communities and advocates addressing existing inequities head on through long-term mitigation and adaptation strategies, so that no one is left behind.
* To support businesses in their own adaptation and in their efforts to provide society with adaptation solutions, the EU needs to further enable and encourage conditions for innovation, investment and trade that enhance sustainable development. Climate adaptation and its costs should also be an integral part of the EU's industrial strategy.
* The EESC believes that agriculture, forestry and fisheries are among the most directly affected businesses while at the same time contributing to adaptation solutions, carbon sequestration and food security. Intensive research and innovation are needed to support these sectors.
* There are several sources of EU funding available for financing adaptation: the budget of the European Green Deal, the MFF and NextGenerationEU. The EESC calls for more clarity on the different options, as well as user-friendly procedures to ensure timely access to financing at a practical level.
* The EESC also calls for measures that will make channelling investment to the fossil fuel industry the least favourable strategy for financial institutions, and create an incentive for allocating private financial flows to activities supporting climate mitigation and adaptation. This is important for investments both inside and outside the EU; in order for the Union to emerge as a global standard-setter in the field of sustainable finance, the Commission should keep the bar high and follow science-based and technology-neutrality principles, including in the EU Taxonomy.
* The Strategy acknowledges the need for additional international finance for climate change adaptation, including from public sources; however, the EESC urges the Commission to clarify how exactly it will unlock barriers to accessing finance for the most vulnerable countries, communities and sectors globally and how it will include proposals for the integration of gender and tackling inequalities at regional and local level.
* Overall, the Committee sees the Strategy as a basis for a legally binding initiative, obliging Member States to develop national climate change adaptation plans and strategies. The European Climate Law will be instrumental in achieving binding climate-related policies.
* Local and regional governments, as the implementing authorities for most adaptation initiatives, should be supported with sufficient resources to develop capacity in this area.

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# **CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL CHANGE**

* ***Action Plan on synergies between civil, defence and space industries***

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| **Rapporteur:** | Manuel GARCíA SALGADO (Workers' Group – ES) |
| **Co-rapporteur:** | Jan PIE (Category 1 – SE) |
|  | |
| **Reference:** | EESC-2021-01790-00-01-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC:

* The EESC fully supports the objectives of the Action Plan, which is the right initiative to promote synergies between EU-funded instruments, while also facilitating cross-fertilisation between civil, defence and space industries, enhancing European strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty, improving the security of citizens.
* The Commission is encouraged to introduce new forms of integrated planning across relevant programmes and to frame relevant EU programmes to achieve a greater coherence and a strategic use of EU funding.
* The envisaged *Observatory for Critical Technologies* is essential to foster cross-fertilization and should, in particular, develop a common technology taxonomy applicable to all sectors.
* The full engagement of relevant stakeholders, in particular industry and RTOs, is crucial for the successful implementation of the Action Plan.
* SMEs play a key role in the process of implementing the Action Plan. It is therefore important to ensure that they have access to all the measures envisaged.
* Targeted recruitment, retention and advancement of women in the defence and security sectors should be prioritised, along with ensuring quality jobs and qualifications for young people, in order to foster social inclusion and gender equality.
* A return on investment should not only be viewed in economic terms, but also in terms of key aspects such as employment, job creation and the quality of employment.
* The EESC sees a need, even if dealing with investments of high strategic value, to include a requirement to carry out evaluations of investments and to monitor them against set corporate social responsibility standards.

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