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Brussels, 14 April 2023

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| **577TH PLENARY SESSION**  **22 and 23 March 2023**  **SUMMARY OF ADOPTED OPINIONS, RESOLUTIONS AND INFORMATION / EVALUATION REPORTS** |
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# **RESOLUTION**

* ***United for Democracy***

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| **Rapporteurs:** | Stefano MALLIA (Employers' Group –MT)  Oliver RÖPKE (Workers' Group –AT)  Séamus BOLAND (Civil Society Organisations' Group –IE) |
| **References** | EESC-2023-01445-00-00-RES |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* calls for the effective implementation of Article 11 of the TEU, including a European strategy for civil society and a European Statute of Associations, to enable a truly empowering and inclusive space, in order to renew engagement and implement structured civil dialogue across EU institutions;
* emphasises the need to strengthen the key role of organised civil society and social partners in supporting deliberative democracy, complementing representative democracy, to further strengthen civil dialogue in all Member States and at EU level. We must collectively seek a new balance between representative democracy, participatory democracy, and direct democracy;
* highlights the need to develop transversal competences as the true backbone of a participatory and deliberative democracy: cooperation, critical thinking, problem-solving, democratic and collective management, conflict resolution, civic education and media literacy;
* reiterates its readiness to act as a key hub for citizens and organised civil society participation, including future citizens' panels, to multiply the effect of ongoing citizens' consultations organised by the European Commission and other institutions, and to systematically collect feedback from European organised civil society on all the major priorities and policies of the European political agenda;
* reaffirms its commitment to helping further develop tools to enhance participatory and deliberative democracy, such as the European Citizens' Initiative and Online EU Public Consultations;
* emphasises the importance of the 2024 European elections and of the crucial role of CSOs in encouraging voter participation and pro-European sentiment, as well as in countering abstention and disinformation. In this regard, it is equally important to involve young people and youth organisations in mobilising first-time voters and young voters.

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# **ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION**

* ***Review of the European Market Infrastructure Regulation***

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| **Rapporteur** | Florian MARIN (Workers' Group – RO) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 696-697 final  EESC-2022-05896-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the proposal of the Commission and its efforts towards strategic autonomy of capital markets, increased internal clearing capacity and a more robust clearing system;
* expected a clearer stance on reducing exposure to UK central counterparties (CCPs) and more specific rules and incentives after Brexit;
* considers that it is crucial to have specific data about the EU clearing system covering all asset classes and volumes. Social, governance and environmental risks of CCPs must be included in risk models and have the same level of importance;
* requests a comprehensive evaluation of potential additional costs for the European Securities and Markets Authority and other EU bodies to accomplish with their reinforced role;
* is disappointed that the Commission did not assess the existing clearing framework. The proposed five-year deadline for the review of the new framework is too long;
* suggests that the EU CCPs must be transparent about their fees, margin calls and actions during periods of market stress, in order to improve predictability;
* asks the Commission to explain the specific definition of the term "urgently", and asks the co-legislators to establish which exemptions are considered "urgent" decisions;
* proposes that civil society is involved in the monitoring mechanism established under Article 23c, and that the EESC takes part of the Joint Monitoring Mechanism as an observer;
* considers that more should be done to reduce the time required to authorise or extend activities and services, as well as to build a central database. The EESC asks for more interoperability, a reduced administrative burden and simpler access solutions.

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* ***Administrative cooperation in taxation (DAC 8)***

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| **Rapporteur** | Petru DANDEA (Workers' Group – RO) |
| **Co-rapporteur** | Benjamin RIZZO (Civil Society Organisations' Group – MT) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 707 final  EESC-2022-06314-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* deems the proposed improvements to the DAC Directive to be effective in deterring non-compliance with fiscal rules by crypto-asset holders, thereby reinforcing the fight against tax fraud, tax evasion, and tax avoidance;
* notes that a global effort to regulate crypto-assets and their use is key in order to successfully address the growing issues and implications with a worldwide scope relating to such assets;
* appreciates that enhanced and more effective taxation of crypto-assets will help increase the coverage of taxation and boost national budgets, allowing the deployment of additional resources targeted at the common good;
* considers that the tax identification number ("TIN") reporting system is the most effective compliance method for ensuring the effectiveness of the new rules;
* deems that reporting obligations should not only be limited to exchanges and transfers in crypto-assets, but should also be extended, at least during the initial phase, to overall holdings of crypto-currency;
* stresses the need for effective and proportional penalties, leaving to Member States the decision on the specific amounts of sanctions to be issued;
* hopes that the penalties and compliance measures will be able to strike a proper balance between effectiveness of the rules and adequate deterrence on the one hand and proportionality on the other hand.

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* ***Listing rules for public markets (Listing act)***

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| **Rapporteur-General** | Kęstutis KUPŠYS (Civil Society Organisations' Group – LT) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 760-761-762 final  EESC-2022-05409-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* underlines that increased equity funding for European companies is key and therefore strongly welcomes the Listing Act proposed by the Commission;
* believes that bringing family-owned companies to capital markets would open up untapped potential to attract capital for growth, and a multiple-voting rights regime helps families to retain control, making listing more attractive to them. The EESC agrees that a detailed framework design should be produced at the national level, while encouraging high-level EU harmonisation;
* welcomes the Commission's initiative to streamline the contents of a prospectus that would significantly reduce costs and burden for issuers;
* welcomes the proposal to give issuers the choice to publish a prospectus in English only. However, publication of a full-scale document, and not only the summary, in national languages would empower local retail investors. Using "English-only" issuance documents would hinder the development of a national retail investment base;
* notes that bundling investment research with other services is likely to increase the visibility of listed small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Therefore, the Committee welcomes the proposed increase in the unbundling threshold to EUR 10 billion; however, further measures to encourage independent research may also be needed;
* highly values the Commission's approach in mitigating legal uncertainty surrounding information disclosure requirements.

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# **EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP**

* ***Violation of sanctions / EU crimes***

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| **Rapporteur** | José Antonio MORENO DĺAZ (Workers' Group – ES) |
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| **References** | COM(2022) 249-684 final  EESC-2022-03748-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* encourages the EU institutions to expand the humanitarian carve out, in order to exempt and protect humanitarian agencies and personnel from criminal liability, while ensuring that appropriate mechanisms are provided for to prevent abuse for criminal or political purposes. The EESC also calls for provisions for the protection of whistle-blowers and journalists reporting on these violations;
* remarks the importance to ensure full democratic scrutiny on the directive proposal, given that no impact assessment had been carried out and the Council decision was adopted via urgent procedure in the European Parliament;
* demands that the private sector and civil society organisations are provided adequate information and proactive support in adjusting to the new legislation and in complying with the requirements of sanction regimes;
* calls for Member States to be equipped with adequate administrative capacities, sufficient funds, and trained personnel for detecting, prosecuting and punishing sanctions violations, and for the sharing of best practices among judicial and law enforcement authorities;
* remains concerned that common crimes as serious as gender-based violence and hate crimes remain outside the scope of Article 83(1) TFEU.

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* ***Recommendation on minimum income***

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| **Rapporteurs** | Jason DEGUARA (Workers' Group – MT) |
|  | Paul SOETE (Employers' Group – BE) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 490 final  EESC-2022-04756-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the content of the recommendation, particularly the implementation of realistic and sufficient criteria for the level and accessibility of minimum income, its legal guarantee and the reporting system;
* calls for the setting up of a robust methodology for the setting and level of minimum income benefits to take into account the different income sources and the specific situations of households; believes that minimum income schemes should be part of national strategies to combat poverty which integrate measures to achieve amongst others fair wages and decent work and access to affordable and good quality essential services;
* points at the need for a rights-based approach for all to an adequate minimum income which leaves no one behind, does not have overly restrictive criteria and is accurately measured to ensure that it is effective; insists on the necessity of keeping minimum incomes in line with inflation, and to do so on a regular basis, with the support of CSOs, social partners and welfare organisations; proposes that Member States should assess minimum income levels at least on a yearly basis;
* calls for special attention to be given to specific groups such as single-parent families, migrant families, young people, people with disabilities and Roma; highlights the importance of minimum income schemes for self-employed people in Europe; draws attention to the need for pension systems which provide an adequate pension so that pensioners do not have to rely on minimum income support;
* believes that minimum income schemes should include both cash and in-kind services to those who cannot work or for whom it is almost impossible to work; transparent and non-discriminatory access criteria should be put in place in the Member States to address issues related to coverage.

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* ***Young people's role in the green transition***

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| **Rapporteur** | Nicoletta MERLO (Workers' Group – IT) |
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| **References** | Exploratory opinion requested by the Swedish presidency  EESC-2023-00128-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* believes that to enable young people to play a crucial role in the context of the green transition, a new more inclusive governance model that is capable of ensuring the active involvement of young people in decision-making processes is essential;
* points at the importance of ensuring a leading role for youth organisations in the decision-making process and in the development and dissemination of projects relating to sustainability and the environment; calls in this regard on the EU institutions to provide these organisations with structural financial support through adequate and specific resources, so that they have the right conditions to ensure and develop young people's engagement in the green transition;
* considers it necessary to start teaching sustainability and environmental protection issues from an early age; points at the importance of equipping workers, both younger and older, with the skills needed to govern the innovation brought about by the green transition, with an emphasis on work-based learning, on-the-job training and quality internships and apprenticeships; it is important to link the initiatives and policies that will be adopted in the context of the European Year of Skills to the theme of the green transition and sustainable development and to the challenges faced by young people in a rapidly changing world;
* encourages EU institutions and Member States to implement measures to ensure that the youth perspective is taken into account in all policy areas, and to create a space for young people to make a coherent and competency-based contribution to the challenges they face through the full adoption of the EU Youth Test;
* considers that Member States should invest significant resources to support businesses that need to convert their activities, to redeploy workers who have been made redundant and to support entrepreneurs, particularly young ones, who intend to invest in green businesses, so that the green transition is also a just transition; more resources are also needed to offer young people careers guidance at school and to support them into work.

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* ***Strengthening the role and independence of equality bodies***

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| **Rapporteurs** | Sif HOLST (Civil Society Organisations' Group – DK) |
|  | Nicoletta MERLO (Workers' Group – IT) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 688-689 final  EESC-2022-05875-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the initiative to give equality bodies the role of advocates for the rights of victims of discrimination and it emphasises the importance of striking the right balance between setting out standards for equality bodies and subsidiarity, while ensuring that increasing the strength and effectiveness of equality bodies remains a priority;
* requests that intersectionality and multiple forms of discrimination be taken into account in policies at both national and EU level, and welcomes the clarification that accessibility for all also requires attention to the accessibility requirements of persons with disabilities;
* welcomes the introduction of a legal obligation for equality bodies to be free from external influence and provisions to ensure that they have sufficient human, technical and financial resources;
* recommends that Member States should be required to report on actions taken in relation to their interactions with equality bodies;
* suggests that the reporting timeframe of the supervision mechanism can be reduced to three years;
* considers it very important to respect the diversity of national legal frameworks on non-discrimination and to take into account differences in the way social partners and civil society organisations are involved in the process. The EESC also recognises that exercising investigative powers in the context of proceedings on behalf of or in support of victims of discrimination must be without prejudice to the powers of courts and other public monitoring bodies;
* calls for proportionate compensation to be guaranteed for the offence suffered by the victim and penalties to be ensured for offenders, with a view to focusing on the victims of discrimination;
* recommends the development of information campaigns on EU rights and respect for diversity, that can be carried out at local level by national equality bodies, with special attention for vulnerable groups, children and young people at school;
* calls for the regular collection and analysis of disaggregated data to monitor inequalities and discrimination.

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* ***Limit values for lead and its inorganic compounds and diisocyanates***

**Category C opinion**

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| **References** | COM(2023) 71 final  EESC-2023-01367-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

Since the Committee endorses the content of the proposal and feels that it requires no comment on its part, it decided to issue an opinion endorsing the proposed text, while respecting the position of social partners presented in the explanatory memorandum to the proposal.

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# **SINGLE MARKET, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION**

* ***Ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020***

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| **Rapporteur** | Gonçalo LOBO XAVIER (Employers' Group – PT) |
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| **References** | Evaluation report  EESC-2022-03850-00-00-RE |

**Key points**

The EESC:

Regarding **effectiveness**:

* considers the **impact of Horizon 2020** (H2020) to be **positive**. The programme is considered to be much better than its predecessors, delivering a **larger impact on society**;
* draws attention to low SME involvement, barriers to their participation, with the SME Instrument being difficult to benefit from. Therefore, recommends that future programmes should enhance SME involvement and lower the barriers for SMEs to participate;
* states that rigidity and bureaucracy were named as obstacles and shortcomings of H2020;
* calls for the acceleration of review processes and the simplification of the evaluation process while increasing their transparency and consistency;
* believes that synergies with regional and national funding programmes should be improved;
* in order to improve predictability, suggests providing budget and working programmes ahead of time.

Regarding **relevance**:

* considers H2020 **extremely relevant**, as the participation in such programmes helps to **build political and scientific capital** and has **positive effects on the reputation**. H2020 also enabled the establishment of **strategic partnerships** within new or existing networks;
* sees the **failure to close the gap between EU15 and EU13 countries** as the **main shortcoming** of H2020.

Regarding **civil society involvement**:

* stresses that **involving civil society** at an early stage **helps tackling societal challenges** and benefits all parties;
* argues that despite the disparities between Member States, it is clear that **civil society organisations can add value to** **all stages of the innovation process**;
* calls for a serious **impact assessment** of H2020 and investing in its **communication** as civil society engagement and support to R&I funding is seen as critical.

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* ***Strategic Foresight Report 2022***

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| **Rapporteur** | Angelo PAGLIARA (Workers' Group – IT) |
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| **References** | COM(2022) 289 final  EESC-2022-04981-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* encourages the EC to **continue developing the strategic foresight agenda**, and calls for **increased involvement in the process from the very beginning**. Greater involvement for the EESC, as the voice of the social partners and organised civil society, would enhance the EU's analysis and foresight capacities and help to pinpoint trends and possible solutions;
* calls the strategic foresight agenda, and the EC's action, to gear towards a **new development model that takes due account of economic, environmental and social sustainability**;
* calls to take into account following strategic policy areas in upcoming foresight exercises:
* The supply systems and the resilience of Europe's agri-food sector.
* A strong, cohesive, and innovative European industrial system that is capable of generating quality jobs.
* The need for strategic energy autonomy and to support businesses and workers following on from what was done during the pandemic crisis.
* Set out a clearer picture of the risks and analyse the scenarios in the event that the desired objectives are not met, especially on the availability of raw materials, rare earth metals, water resources and possible related issues.
* acknowledges that the Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the energy crisis and the new economic and geopolitical reality will have an **impact on the path towards the twin transitions**;
* welcomes the **increased references to the social dimension** and, as previously stated in its 2021 opinion, calls to develop forecasting tools relating to the impact of the transitions on social security systems, and propose measures to mitigate the social effects of the twin transitions;
* believes that the EU needs to stand by its values and to continue working together with third countries, strengthening the common external policy, looking for common solutions and ensuring that our cooperation and trade are beneficial to the economic and social rights of the peoples of those countries, in view of long-term sustainability.

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* ***European Interoperability Act***

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| **Rapporteur** | Vasco DE MELLO (Employers' Group – PT) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 710-720 final  EESC-2022-05805-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* believes that interoperability between public services is an essential requirement for a digital single market to be established;
* considers, however, that achieving this objective **must not involve Member States adopting a policy of complete digitalisation of public services to the detriment of those provided in person**; it should take into consideration the most vulnerable population groups. **Training on digital skills** should be available to everyone, but in particular to these population groups;
* observes that instead of reducing personnel, the development and operation of digital services will, initially, create an additional need for personnel. **Adequate staffing is a prerequisite for a successful digital transformation**;
* considers it important for future funding programmes for public service interoperability projects to make granting of funding conditional on adopting the principles and structures advocated by the European Interoperability Framework;
* welcomes the fact that this process fits into the so-called dual transition but warns that **some technological solutions for digitalisation could be highly energy-intensive**;
* believes that, **with the necessary care taken, data protection cannot be allowed to be an obstacle** to either public services or private individuals creating new interoperable solutions;
* believes that access to data should be subject to different levels of authorisation in order to **safeguard data confidentiality** and to ensure that only data that is strictly necessary is disclosed.

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* ***Enhancing the convergence of insolvency proceedings***

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| **Rapporteur** | Sandra PARTHIE (Employers' Group – DE) |
| **Co-rapporteur** | Philip VON BROCKDORFF (Workers' Group – MT) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 702 final  EESC-2022-05781-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* underlines that **a properly designed insolvency regime should help viable businesses to remain operational**, avoiding their premature liquidation. The aim should be to find a balance between premature insolvency and proceedings starting too late;
* doubts whether the proposal, which is presented as an important step in closing relevant gaps for the improvement of the EU's Capital Market Union, can actually fulfil this expectation. The **proposal falls short of providing a harmonised definition of insolvency grounds and the ranking of claims**, both of which are key to achieving greater efficiency and limiting the existing fragmentation in national insolvency rules;
* urges the Commission, the Parliament and the Council **to revise the proposal in Article 27 to oblige counterparties**, e.g. suppliers to a business that is entering insolvency proceeding, **to sign executory contracts, which are then assigned to the acquirer of the business without the consent of the counterparty**;
* welcomes the proposal to **introduce a special procedure to facilitate and speed up the winding down of microenterprises**, allowing for a more cost-efficient insolvency process for such enterprises;
* recommends **resorting to** other competent players, other than national courts, such as **insolvency practitioners, to help reduce the burden on the judiciary**;
* is of the view that efficient **insolvency and creditor/debtor rights (ICR) regimes are one of the complementary tools** in the policy maker's arsenal **to contain the growth of NPLs (non-performing loans)** by increasing loan repayment probability and by adjusting NPL levels more quickly.

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* ***Revision of the Design Directive and Regulation***

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| **Rapporteur** | Ferre WYCKMANS (Workers' Group – BE) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 666-667 final  EESC-2023-00101-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* **endorses the new definition of a design** set out in the proposal for a directive;
* supports **limiting protection** to those features of appearance, which are shown visibly in the application for registration, as this increases the **legal certainty of the protection**;
* welcomes the fact that the proposal for a regulation takes up the solution put forward by the Court of Justice of the EU in its "Acacia" judgment[[1]](#footnote-1), in which it clarified the interpretation of the concept of a "**repair clause**", especially since this solution improves **consumer protection**;
* **does not believe that merging the publication and registration fees will reduce the total cost** of the fees, as the cost of renewals, as proposed, will increase drastically;
* would like to see **lower fees for SMEs and individual designers**, perhaps in proportion to their turnover;
* believes that the **simplification brought about by abolishing the "unity of class" rule is necessary but not sufficient**, as there is still a need to improve the usability of the design filing systems available on the websites of the national industrial property offices and the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO). To meet this challenge, offices could make use of the **expertise of patent agents**;
* considers it **inappropriate to use Article 290 of the TFEU** to draw up rules on disputes and appeals against EUIPO decisions.

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

* ***Waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE)***

**Category C opinion**

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| **References** | COM(2023) 63 final  EESC-2023-00995-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

unreservedly supports the new proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2012/19/EU on waste electrical and electronic equipment and does not wish to take a position on the proposal. Furthermore, the endorsement is based on a previously expressed position on the matter in the opinion on Circular Economy, adopted on 12 November 2014[[2]](#footnote-2).

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* ***Revision of the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking***

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| **Rapporteur** | Ozlem YILDIRIM (Workers' Group – FR) |
| **Co-rapporteur** | Cillian LOHAN (Civil Society Organisations' Group – IE) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 581 final  EESC-2022-05701-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the Commission's commitment to financial and human resources in the EU funds to curb wildlife trafficking by integrating wildlife trade. However, the **percentage of the allocation of funds to wildlife trafficking** including the training of staff to fight wildlife trafficking in Member States **should be agreed upon, as well as reported, monitored, and evaluated as part of the implementation of the action plan at national level**;
* underlines the importance of effective and dissuasive sanction mechanisms for wildlife trafficking. The **current level of the sanctions proposed** by the Council in the context of the Environmental Crime Directive **is too low and should be increased** for achieving a successful EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking;
* **calls for homogenous structures** for all Member States, which should take the form of **inter-agency committees and specialized units or staff trained to combat wildlife trafficking** as well as dedicated channels for communication and collaboration with social partners and civil society.

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* ***Carbon Removal Certification***

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| **Rapporteur** | Stoyan TCHOUKANOV (Civil Society Organisations' Group – BG) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 672 final  EESC-2022-06159-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the Commission's proposal for an EU certification framework for carbon removals, recognising the need to scale up carbon removals and promote regenerative practices, while not losing the primary focus on crucial greenhouse gas emission reductions to limit global warming;
* recognises that different carbon removal validation and reward schemes currently exist across the Union and that a common certification framework has the potential to give clarity and reliability to measurement and verification of climate benefits of removals, while more clarity is still required on the expected timeline for full implementation, considering the set of bodies and certification units that will need to be created;
* calls for the expected carbon storage duration and reversal risks to be clearly reflected in the use of the different carbon removal certificates in order to prevent greenwashing;
* calls for further safeguards around the value and use of certificates and invites the Commission to provide guidance defining appropriate claims that can be made based on different instances of certified carbon removal;
* calls on the Commission to ensure that the methodologies are based on scientific evidence and points out that the system for certification is far too complex and burdensome to promote a major uptake of these practices in particular by small-scale businesses;
* stresses that it is essential to keep the costs of measuring, reporting and verifying of carbon removal activities as low as possible, to ensure broad accessibility of the certification framework;
* stresses that the potential risks and side effects for major players (farmers, forest industry, and construction and wood industries) need to be carefully assessed and addressed before integrating the certification framework into other policies;
* considers that the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) should not be used to finance carbon farming or carbon removals[[3]](#footnote-3)and that additional financing sources should be made available;
* feels that the high level of ambiguity around financing will act as a strong disincentive for participation for potential partakers, therefore emphasising that some level of certainty in relation to financing is necessary, for example through a roadmap towards a common financial instrument.

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* ***EU Strategy on fertilisers***

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| **Rapporteur** | Arnold PUECH d'ALISSAC (Employers' Group – FR) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 590 final  EESC-2022-05716-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the communication from the Commission on ensuring availability and affordability of fertilisers as the global fertiliser crisis, which started in early 2021 and worsened following the war in Ukraine, is particularly acute in Europe where farmers are facing both record prices and supply shortages. The current situation is a threat to European agriculture and global food security;
* highlights that emergency domestic actions are required to limit the impact of the fertiliser crisis. Besides the possibility of directly supporting the most affected nitrogen manufacturers and farmers through State Aid (which faces budgetary constraints, raises risks of competitive distortions and should be subject to conditionality), the EESC considers that corrective measures are necessary to improve the functioning of the EU fertiliser market, as they are likely to have a greater impact on farmers and be more cost effective for taxpayers;
* advises taking actions that include the suspension of EU import tariffs on all fertilisers, the facilitation of fertiliser logistics and regulatory flexibilities to addresses both fertiliser supply and prices by facilitating imports and domestic competition;
* considers that medium-term measures are required to limit the EU's dependence on imported mineral fertilisers and reduce the environmental footprint of crop fertilisation. These should aim to limit fertiliser use through enhanced plant nutrient efficiency, partly substituting synthetic fertilisers by recycled livestock manure and other waste, and improving Europe's self-sufficiency in fertiliser production;
* further calls for taking into consideration the social aspects related to farmers (who are highly impacted by fertiliser prices) food consumers (who are facing food price inflation) and industry workers when adopting new measures;
* urges the EU to step up actions against global food insecurity, including the promotion of fertiliser transparency, availability and effective use. Global fertiliser trade should be facilitated by keeping markets open, avoiding export restrictions and bans, increasing fertiliser production and expanding logistic routes.

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# **EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

* ***Youth action plan in the EU external action***

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| **Rapporteur** | Michael MCLOUGHLIN (Civil Society Organisations' Group – IE) |
| **Co-rapporteur** | Tatjana BABRAUSKIENĖ (Workers' Group – LT) |
| **References** | Own-initiative opinion  EESC-2022-05742-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* while welcoming the Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action, points out that there may be **challenges in the roll-out and delivery**, which will **need monitoring and oversight**. It would like to see **constant attention paid during implementation to the most marginalised young people**, and all leadership work being complemented by an equal **focus on grassroots support for youth in local communities**;
* expresses its wish to be actively involved in the implementation of YAP;
* believes that the **expertise and experience of youth organisations in the EU, and around the world, is a great resource in the delivery of the plan**, both for the European Commission and the EU delegations;
* recommends that **target countries should be encouraged and given the tools to have their own tangible dedicated youth policies and national youth councils or equivalents**;
* is of the opinion that **activities focusing on education should be centred on equality**, particularly protecting young girls, and that strategies should ensure the engagement of hardest to reach;
* welcomes and **encourages links with the work of the United Nations (UN) and its' agencies** in this area, particularly with regard to the Youth Peace and Security Agenda and any synergies with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

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

* ***State of the Energy Union 2022***

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| **Rapporteurs** | Lutz RIBBE (Civil Society Organisations' Group – DE) |
|  | Angelo PAGLIARA (Workers' Group – IT)  Marcin NOWACKI (Employers' Group – PL) |
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| **References** | COM(2022) 547 final  EESC-2022-05991-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* believes that the **central and active role of citizens**, who should be placed at the centre of the policies, is not appropriately considered in the document or the annexes. The **citizens should be at the core of the Energy Union**, integrating them into the market, and making them real "**prosumers**";
* underlines the **lack of clear European coordination during the energy crisis** and, as part of the response, **calls for the creation of an instrument based on the SURE model**, in order to support workers and businesses in difficulty;
* regrets the fact that two topics are **not properly considered** in the report:  **the "strategic energy autonomy"**, which remains in the shadows, with the focus solely on independence from energy imports from Russia, **and the importance of comprehensive employment**, skills and social policies.

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* ***Wooden construction for CO2 reduction in building sector***

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| **Rapporteur** | Rudolf KOLBE (Civil Society Organisations' Group – AT) |
| **Co-rapporteur** | Sam HÄGGLUND (Workers' Group – SE) |
| **References** | Exploratory opinion requested by the Swedish Presidency  EESC-2022-06006-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC considers that:

* an increase in the use of sustainable wood in construction, especially in public buildings, is essential to reduce carbon emissions and must be promoted through active and responsible forest management in the EU;
* quality-based procurement procedures, including allowing innovative solutions and including sustainability and life-cycle criteria, are a prerequisite for achieving climate objectives and promoting timber construction;
* it is key to establish minimum standards for life-cycle carbon emissions from buildings and for the corresponding carbon reporting requirement across the construction sector;
* barriers to timber construction arising from formal, legal and technical requirements should be scrutinised as to their necessity with respect to planning quality.

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* ***Digitalising the energy system – EU Action Plan***

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| **Rapporteur** | Thomas KATTNIG (Workers' Group – AT) |
| **Co-rapporteur** | Zsolt KÜKEDI (Civil Society Organisations' Group – HU) |
| **References** | COM(2022) 552 final  EESC-2022-06280-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* points out the link between the energy transition and the digital transformation, stressing the benefits of digitalisation in terms of energy savings, reduced energy intensity and better management of energy infrastructure;
* stresses the importance of strengthening the role of active consumers in digitalisation and of encouraging and entitling them to use as many smart solutions as possible. The tools must be user-friendly, and vulnerable groups and people with disabilities must be in focus: if the social dimension is neglected in the implementation, the transformation risks failing due to public resistance;
* underlines the possible risk that new data-driven services and innovative technology solutions are not implemented fast enough if there are not enough skilled workers. The necessary labour market and education policy measures require sufficient financial resources as well as the development of an action plan to ensure a coordinated approach.

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1. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A62016CJ0397> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. EESC opinion on *The circular economy in the EU*, [OJ C 230 of 14.7.2015, p.91](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2015.230.01.0091.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2015%3A230%3ATOC) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. EESC opinion on Sustainable Carbon Cycles - [OJ C 323, 26.8.2022, p. 95](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2022:323:SOM:EN:HTML). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)