



EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee
A bridge between Europe and organised civil society
September 2017 | EN



EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

The many faces of European solidarity

Brexit, economic competitiveness, job creation and social security, immigration, natural disasters, fear: Europe is facing a myriad of challenges, and many Europeans are convinced, as I am, that the European Union can only rise to these challenges by sticking together and joining forces.

This summer my home country, Portugal, was hit by the devastating forest fires that also struck several other countries in southern Europe. As we struggled to put out the fires, we experienced what European solidarity means when we received prompt assistance under the EU-wide coordination system, which helped us deal with the catastrophe. Unfortunately many lives have been lost as a result of these enormous disasters.

European solidarity has many faces, ranging from the euro rescue package to assistance in asylum centres in the Member States most affected by migration. It could also include putting up a united front against interference by non-European leaders in national or European decisions and issues. Solidarity is not a one-way street: a country can be a receiver at one time and a giver at another. Solidarity definitely involves mutual assistance and is inherent in the ideal of Europe.

European solidarity also includes sticking to the same democratic rules. Europeans need assurance that their leaders will uphold the values of democracy, freedom of speech, independence of the media, gender equality and solidarity. When these values are in danger or no longer guaranteed, it is the EU's joint duty to defend them, including by sanctions or other measures provided for by the Treaties. I do hope that, for pending decisions, democratic principles will eventually prevail in all our Member States. I also count on all Member States to fulfil their duties vis-à-vis the EU asylum system. A Union cannot work properly when each Member State wants to work alone.

The EESC is well aware of how important it is to work together on an equal footing, and to find good compromises that work well for east and west, north and south, and that suit workers and employers as well as consumers and producers. This involves dialogue but also flexibility. The willingness to tackle a problem and the readiness to sacrifice one's position for the sake of a common solution are necessary attitudes for a Union of 28.

As work resumes in Brussels after the summer break, I wish to remind European leaders of their duty and responsibility towards their own citizens and towards Europe as a whole. I am convinced that my colleagues from the Member States concerned will do their utmost to defend democratic rights in their countries and support European solutions. I expect the same from European political leaders, as freedom and social peace are assets that are too important to be put at risk.

Welcome back to Brussels!

Gonçalo Lobo Xavier
EESC Vice - President

Fake products cost the EU 800 000 jobs annually

Customs Union crucial in the fight against counterfeiting.

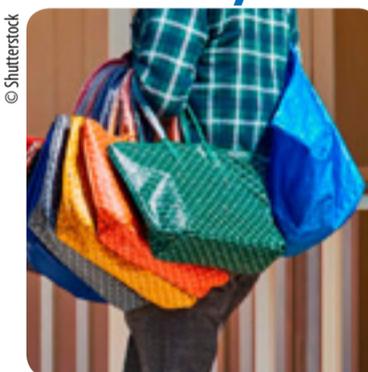
The production of counterfeit goods is on the rise. While still considered an external phenomenon, it is also on the increase within the EU. Criminal networks see counterfeiting as a profitable business, with lower risks than other activities, and the advantage of lower transport costs and circumventing customs controls. Though heavily based on estimates and approximations, the figures are alarming: for the EU, the OECD reckons that up to 5% or EUR 85 billion of imported goods are counterfeit or pirated, causing the loss of roughly 800 000 jobs and around EUR 14.3 billion in annual tax revenues.

The EESC believes the EU and its Member States should no longer ignore this phenomenon, and calls on them to support affected SMEs

and industries by updating, harmonising and strengthening the regulatory framework. **Antonello Pezzini** (Employers' Group – IT), rapporteur of the EESC opinion on **The counterfeit and pirated products industry**, adopted at the EESC's July plenary, urged the European Commission and Member States to focus on accelerating the establishment of a single European customs system with shared procedures and instruments and unified, readily available databases.

Industries and brand owners also need to seek partnerships with internet site providers, content producers, electronic payment operators, advertisers and internet domain registers: together, they will be able to generate rapid adjustments in the face of sudden market changes.

The 3 000 free zones located in 135 different countries – with the Tanger Med



free zone in Morocco only 15 km away from the EU – need special attention, as they are often used to exchange, document and re-label container contents.

The EESC calls for a **new EU framework for 2018-2021**, with a fully financed and coordinated **action plan** to strengthen anti-counterfeiting legislation and initiatives at EU level. (sma)

Michel Barnier at the EESC: "There is no cherry-picking on Brexit"

"Brexit means uncertainty", said **Michel Barnier** at the outset of the debate with EESC members on 6 July, "uncertainty for citizens, businesses and jobs". He stressed his task was to negotiate on the basis of what the UK put on the table, which included no free movement for EU citizens, full autonomy of laws, no role for the European Court of Justice and the autonomy to sign free trade agreements, which would involve leaving the customs union and the single market.

But there was also one certainty, he said, namely that the UK would become a third country, and that:

- The basic freedoms - free movement of people, goods and capital – were indivisible;
- There was no option for sector-by-sector participation in the Single Market; and
- The EU would retain its independence in setting economic and social rules and standards that all third parties must respect.

The UK and the EU needed to be aware that Brexit had a cost and it was the task of the negotiating team to keep this cost as low as possible, said Mr Barnier.

EESC members voiced their concerns on consumer rights, social rights and trade policy. Irish and Northern Irish members raised the issue of the Good Friday Agreement, which had mainly been achieved with the help of the EU.

Mr Barnier stressed that the EU wanted a fair, balanced deal, and that failure to reach any deal would be the worst possible outcome, as it would mean reverting to the distant past, with trade relations with the UK being governed by WTO rules, making products more expensive.

All agreed that, although Brexit was important and securing a good deal was in the interests of both the EU27 and the UK, the most important thing was the future of Europe. "We have to make people aware of the countless



Michel Barnier, EU Chief Negotiator for Brexit, with EESC President Georges Dassis

advantages of EU membership. Brexit has shown very clearly that a lot of people are not aware of the fact that these advantages come from being a member of the EU. In the UK, many people are beginning to wake up to this fact. Now it is up to European stakeholders to make the EU27 stronger and more cohesive. The EESC is ready to be a key partner in this process", concluded EESC President **Georges Dassis**. (sma)

DIARY DATES

3-4 October, Panama City
9th meeting of European Union, Latin American and Caribbean Organised Civil Society

3 - 13 October, Brussels
Photo exhibition 20 years of the European Disability Forum", JDE, Foyer 6

18-19 October, Brussels
EESC plenary session

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EESC contribution to the European Commission's 2018 work programme



Creating a positive narrative for the EU, strengthening its economic foundations, fostering its social dimension, facilitating the transition towards a low-carbon and circular economy and empowering and involving civil society: these are the main messages of the EESC's contribution to the European Commission's 2018 Work Programme.

- promotion of entrepreneurship, innovation and industrial development;
- the EU's social dimension;
- public finances focused on sustainable growth, innovation, employment and cohesion;
- protection for Europeans against security threats; and
- the development of structured civil dialogue.

In this contribution to the 2018 Work Programme, adopted on 5 July, the EESC called on the European Commission (EC) to adopt sustainable development as an overarching approach to its work, with reference to the three "pillars" of sustainability: i) strengthening the economic foundations of Europe; ii) fostering its social dimension; and iii) facilitating the transition towards a low-carbon and circular economy.

On 12 July, the EESC President **Georges Dassis** met the EC's First Vice-President, **Frans Timmermans**, to present the document to him. Mr Dassis underlined the focus on sustainable development as a result of a strong link between the economy, employment, people's welfare and the environment.

The EESC made detailed recommendations for action structured around 6 priority policy areas:

During this meeting, Mr Dassis raised the issue of the EESC's appropriate participation in the multi-stakeholder platform on sustainable development goals being set up by the Commission. (mm)

Robotisation of transport must aim at creating value added for society

The digitalisation and robotisation of transport generate countless benefits, but also raise social concerns which must be addressed by EU policy-makers – first and foremost, threats to citizens' privacy and job losses. This is the EESC's message in a ground-breaking own-initiative opinion by rapporteur Tellervo Kylä-Harukka-Ruonala (Employers' Group – FI) adopted at its July plenary.



Better accessibility, greater efficiency, improved traffic safety and reduced emissions are just some of the benefits of the digitalisation and robotisation of transport. As this incremental revolution unfolds, however, its potential threats are also becoming apparent. It is vital for EU policy-makers to address these concerns if society is to make the most of it.

The impact on the labour market and the nature of work is another major public concern. Unmanned transport and the increasing use of robotics in terminal operations will involve job losses. But while robots steal jobs, they will also create new ones, particularly in communication technologies, digital services, electronics and robotics. Physical work and routine tasks will diminish, while problem-solving and creative tasks will play an ever greater role. It is therefore vital to address the skills gap and adapt education systems to respond to the demand for new skills. (dm)

Safety, security and privacy appear to be citizens' main concerns with regard to digital transport. In the future, transport will be entirely data-driven and it is essential to ensure data protection. Increasing cybersecurity and tackling liability issues are also key to allaying public fears.

Rural funding: Keep it simple, but make it better

Europe's rural regions vary within and between Member States. It is important to be aware of these differences and ensure that rural programmes take them into account. In its own-initiative opinion entitled *From the Cork 2.0 declaration to concrete action*, the EESC calls for more targeted funding to help rural areas develop.



Opinion rapporteur **Sofia Björnsson** (Various Interests Group – SE) during the debate

Rural development is a horizontal issue and cannot be shouldered by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development alone. The EESC calls for a more cohesive policy as well as an increase in the share of all ESI funds allocated to rural development in order to reduce disparities and territorial imbalances.

If young people are to remain in rural areas and businesses to thrive, quality broadband coverage is essential. Where market forces are not enough, EU funding should be used to help broadband reach remote communities.

The EESC believes that rural proofing of policy decisions should be mandatory and that **simplification** at all levels is a matter of urgency. The Committee backs the Cork 2.0 Declaration as it offers strong support for an EU rural policy.

Farmland and forests make up 85% of the EU's land area and provide a diverse landscape which can help generate economic activities other than agriculture, particularly in the tourism and recreation industries.

Sustainable agriculture and rural development need innovative solutions. There is great potential for climate-smart solutions and a more circular and bio-based economy. Generating solar, wind, hydro and bio-energy would not only help the climate, but also bring sustainable income for people in rural areas.

Agriculture is also the main driver in the transition to sustainable food systems. Promoting local consumption shortens the supply chain and thus helps our environment. (sma)

EESC calls on EU to recognise SME diversity in legislation

SMEs are the backbone of the European economy and have a huge potential to contribute to its development. Acknowledging that, the EESC is actively pushing EU institutions and Member States to develop strong SME support policies.



Opinion rapporteur **Milena Angelova** (Employers' Group – BG) at the July plenary

In an opinion approved at its July plenary (rapporteur: **Milena Angelova**, Employers' Group – BG), the EESC expressed concern over inefficiencies in the formulation and implementation of SME policies which are hampering their effectiveness, and called on the Commission to address them.

to their diversity, sectoral dynamics and specific features.

The EESC praised the efforts to put SMEs at the heart of economic policies over the last decade, but stressed that EU policies are too broadly targeted and do not recognise the diversity of SMEs.

Small and micro companies are often unaware of existing support mechanisms. There is also a wide communication gap between policy-makers and SMEs, which should be urgently addressed.

EU SME policies should explore the specific needs of microenterprises, family and "traditional" businesses, social enterprises, the liberal professions, self-employed people, and so on, which frequently have very different legal forms and ways of operation.

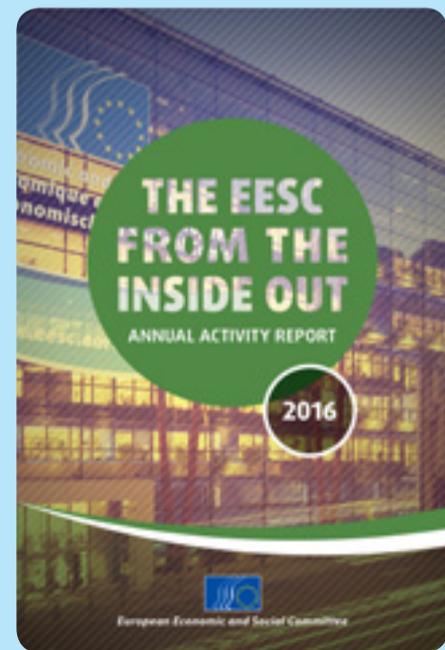
As an active advocate of European SMEs, the EESC has already adopted a number of opinions on how these support policies should be framed, such as those on the review of the Small Business Act (2011), access to finance, the COSME programme, SMEs and global opportunities (2012), and smart regulation (2013). (mq)

In addition, the EESC called on the EC to assess whether the current definition of SMEs corresponds

THE EESC FROM THE INSIDE OUT

2016 Annual Activity Report

The brochure *The EESC from the inside out — Annual Activity Report 2016* has just been published. This is the version of the 2016 Annual Activity Report designed for the general public.



It features charts and other graphics illustrating the workings of the EESC and is available in six language versions: English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Polish. Hard copies can be ordered by contacting the EESC at: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/general-contact-form>

The brochure and full text of the report are available at the following addresses:

Brochure: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/resources/docs/qe-02-17-705-en-n.pdf>

Full text (in English only): <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/resources/docs/aar2016.pdf> (jp)

The EU needs to tackle the issue of ship-breaking

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Europe has the capacity and technical know-how to repair and maintain vessels and oil and gas rigs. There is a strong business case for Europe to maintain and expand a specialised off-shore recycling industry. Now it is the Commission that needs to equip the Ship Recycling Regulation (SRR) with teeth by introducing a financial instrument to encourage recycling in EU-approved facilities.

Two events organised by the EESC and Green MEPs Margrete Auken (DK), Pascal Durand (FR) and Bart Staes (BE) at the end of June highlighted the need for the European Commission to take urgent action.

While the EU's 2013 SRR bans "beaching" (ship-breaking on beaches) and lays down rules for the safe and sustainable recycling of European ships and floating oil and gas rigs, it fails in its purpose, in that international maritime law facilitates flag swapping.

In a 2016 opinion by rapporteur **Martin Siecker** (Workers' Group – NL) and co-rapporteur **Richard Adams** (CCMI delegate – UK), the EESC advocated a financial incentive under the SRR to effectively stop ship owners from swapping a ship's flag to that of a non-EU state. The financial instrument

proposed by the EESC, and now backed by the three Green MEPs, provides for a specific fee for each ship, held in escrow by a major financial institution. The capital would be created by ship owners who, every time one of their vessels called at an EU port, would pay the appropriate charge to the fund linked to that specific vessel to finance its safe and sustainable recycling.

Representatives of the recycling industry and EU ports have confirmed that they have the know-how to dismantle vessels according to EU laws and are willing to invest and create sustainable jobs in the EU. However, European ship owners have expressed strong reservations, arguing that the IMO's Hong Kong Convention has set adequate standards to eliminate the abuses demonstrated by participants. This is in spite of clear evidence that HKC-certified 'yards' are not meeting even the lowest level of compliance required.

Beaching in South Asia is the most dangerous job in the world, according to the ILO. Over the last 30 years the great majority of decommissioned vessels have been dismantled there, with unprotected workers stripping them down in the intertidal zone, causing environmental havoc. (sma) ●

EESC calls for long-term action plan for social economy by 2018



The EESC's 2nd European Day of Social Economy Enterprises (SEEs) saw over 130 social economy representatives call on policy-makers to scale up their efforts to enable the development of the social economy.

In his opening speech, EESC Vice-President **Michael Smyth** called for a long-term roadmap for the social economy as part of the Commission's work programme for 2018.

The event introduced four case studies of innovative European social start-ups:

- PermaFunghi (Brussels), an urban project to produce mushrooms from coffee grounds while creating sustainable jobs for low-skilled people.
- Solidarity Salt (Greece) aims to empower refugee women and develop the local economy. Gourmet sea salt is extracted from Greek salinas and packed in handmade bags.
- HopHopFood (Paris) aims to create solidarity areas for people in situations of food vulnerability while reducing waste, using a digital platform.

- 6zero1 (Luxembourg) is a social economy enterprise incubator supporting entrepreneurs through training, funding and advice to develop economically viable activities.

These success stories inspired workshops which:

- stressed the need to protect SEEs by creating a level playing field and putting an end to abuse of mainstream enterprises (workshop on new economic models).
- asked for better EU migration policies to facilitate early access to the labour market and involve the media in sharing positive stories (workshop on migrant integration).
- called for a project at EU and local level to disseminate good practices of pro-bono activities for the social economy by involving companies (workshop on territorial cohesion).

The Committee has been working on the social economy for more than 10 years, and has created synergies with EU institutions to promote this agenda. (mr) ●

2017 CIVIL SOCIETY DAYS

On 26 and 27 June, the EESC hosted its 2017 Civil Society Days. This major gathering of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from across Europe provided strong civil society input into the debate launched by the Commission with its *White Paper on the Future of Europe*. A forceful call was made for new political impetus to relaunch the EU on the basis of our fundamental values and also to express a clear commitment by CSOs to forge ahead in this domain. A number of **key demands** and commitments from civil society (see <http://bit.ly/2vWVffv>) were adopted and presented to the EU decision-making institutions on four challenging topics: populism, the technological revolution and its impact on work and democracy, the empowerment of civil society organisations, and social and territorial cohesion.

In his opening speech, the EESC president, **Georges Dassis**, called on civil society



Federica Mogherini and Georges Dassis at the Civil Society Days

organisations to play a leading role in these critical times, and drew attention to the rise in populism.

Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy, stressed the importance of participatory democracy. She dwelt on civil society's role in the migration crisis and suggested the EESC draw up an opinion on the cost of non-migration: "Because my impression is that sectors of our economies would collapse the day after, if all migrants disappeared from one day to the next", she said. Her idea was immediately taken up by the EESC President, Georges Dassis. (mr) ●

Future of Europe debate: EESC calls for a common sense of purpose

When deciding on its future path, the EU should seek a common sense of purpose, echoing the sentiment that inspired its founding fathers and that has been a hallmark of all its major achievements.

In its **resolution on the Commission's White Paper on the Future of the EU**, the EESC said it did not believe that this common sense of purpose could be achieved by choosing between the five scenarios put forward. The Commission should instead look for answers by studying examples from the EU's 60 years of existence.



Adopted at the EESC's July plenary, the resolution arose out of a request made by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in April and was the EESC's first contribution to the EU-wide debate on the future of Europe. The Committee also held national debates with civil society representatives in 27 Member States. Their conclusions will feed into an opinion on this subject later this year.

The Committee said that the EU needed comprehensive strategies and a cohesive approach. A genuine debate about the future should also focus on better sharing of political power across the board. The traditional distinction between the national and European levels should disappear.

The EESC is aware that differentiated integration may sometimes be necessary and that enhanced cooperation between some Member States in specific areas could help overcome obstacles or foster positive dynamics in the EU integration process; however, it strongly insists on the need to promote convergence within the Union and to avoid fragmentation and division.

The EESC has proposed that the European Parliament play a central role in determining the EU's future direction, with help from national parliaments. The Committee advocates deeper integration, gradual steps towards political union with a strong social dimension, deepening EMU, and more cohesive governance. (ll) ●

Turkey: call for the state of emergency to be lifted as soon as possible



Ongoing negotiations on enlargement, visa liberalisation and customs union can only progress in an atmosphere of respect for civil liberties, EU and Turkey organisations say.

At the opening session of 36th meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), EESC President **Georges Dassis** welcomed the Turkish Minister of European Affairs, **Ömer Çelik**, saying that: "Despite the existing tensions, dialogue is absolutely essential especially in difficult times like these" and stating his concerns about the current situation in Turkey. "The EESC expresses its solidarity and full support for the organisations of Turkish civil society which defend democracy. We hope we will

once again see a Turkey that is totally democratic", concluded Mr. Dassis. Ömer Çelik stated: "We are committed to the EU process, and our objective is to become a full member - any other form of cooperation does not interest us". While reiterating its strong condemnation of the coup attempt, the JCC stressed that the right to fair trial and due process should be respected and that all measures taken should further strengthen democracy, civil rights and social cohesion, respecting universal fundamental rights, the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law. It also expressed great concern at the arrests and mass dismissals of public servants. The JCC brings together representatives of organised civil society from the EU and Turkey. (ks) ●

Smart solutions for sustainable and inclusive societies

by the EESC's Various Interests Group

In the framework of the Estonian EU presidency, the EESC's Various Interests Group organised an extraordinary meeting in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, on 12 September 2017.

The conference **Smart solutions for sustainable and inclusive societies** focused on promoting e-services, e-government, urban development and e-solutions. It examined their role in boosting innovation and creating a sustainable and inclusive EU – a key component of the current Estonian presidency's work programme.

The event was attended by over 100 local civil society stakeholders and experts. The conference was opened by Luca Jahier, President of the Various



Indrek Saar (Minister of Culture, Estonia), **Arnold Rüütel** (former President of Estonia), **Luca Jahier** (President of the Various Interests Group, EESC)

Interests Group, and key-note speeches were given by Indrek Saar, Estonian Minister of Culture, and Arnold Rüütel, former President of Estonia.

The conference was divided into two parallel workshops, which gave the opportunity to focus on smart technologies serving balanced social development on one hand and smart solutions for sustainable agriculture on the other.

Workshop 1 focused on:

- the development of e-health services
- e-solutions and assistive technologies for disadvantaged groups
- the benefits of inclusive societies

Workshop 2 focused on:

- innovation and sustainability in the farming sector
- the EESC perspective on sustainable farming and innovation
- simple e-solutions for smart farming. (cl)

Digital revolution affects work organisation and skills needs and requires companies to adapt

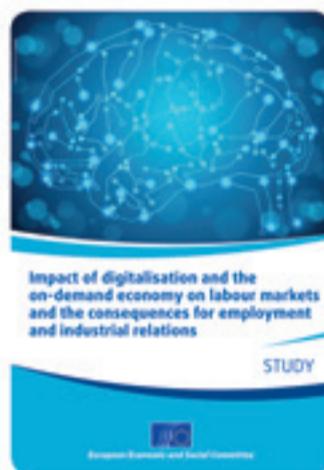
by the EESC's Employers' Group

The labour market of the future will look for workers with digital and entrepreneurial skills and will also seek creativity. As a result of digitalisation, work organisation is characterised by increased flexibility, affecting when, where and how tasks are performed. These are just some of the key conclusions of a recently published study entitled *Impact of digitalisation and the on-demand economy on labour markets and the consequences for employment and industrial relations*.

The study explores the impact of digitalisation on employment, enterprises and labour relations in terms of creation, transformation or destruction of jobs, employees' and employers' altered roles and changes in the organisation of work.

Unlike many other studies previously conducted in this field, which have mostly examined the perspective of employees or workers who offer their labour on online platforms, this study places particular emphasis on the aspects relevant to employers, sectors and businesses of all sizes.

The study was drawn up for the European Economic and Social Committee upon request by the Employers' Group



by a research team from the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). The document is available for download here. (lj)

Against radicalism and terrorism, let us defend our democratic values

by the EESC's Workers' Group

The recent terrorist attacks in Brussels, Paris, Turku and Barcelona, which resulted in the death of a large number of people and serious injuries to many more, have shown us once again that Europe continues to be the target of acts of violence and barbarity.

These terrorists seek to directly challenge our democratic system, our freedoms and our peaceful coexistence, as well as our values of respect for diversity.

This is why European society must provide a common, united response. Political parties, trade unions, businesses and civil society organisations need to speak with a single voice in the face of this tragedy, explicitly stating that attacks and threats do not frighten us and will not succeed in destroying our democratic system and coexistence.

At the same time, we also need to distance ourselves from those who look to exploit this situation for political purposes and who seek to use these



murders to attack migrants and refugees, encouraging xenophobia and racism.

Let us be united in defending our democratic values, against radicalism and terrorism which we strongly condemn.

IN SHORT

EESC Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier on jury for European Volunteering Capital 2019

Gonçalo Lobo Xavier, the EESC Vice-President for Communication, has – for the second consecutive year – been invited to be on the jury that will choose the European Volunteering Capital 2019. On 30 June, three candidates were shortlisted:

Augsburg (Germany), Cascais (Portugal) and Košice (Slovakia). The ultimate winner will be announced on 1 or 2 December 2017. For more information, visit <http://www.cev.be/european-volunteering-capital-2019/>.



Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum

The EESC has participated for the third time in the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum (GMF). The event focused on *Identity and Diversity* and took place in Bonn from 19 to

21 June. EESC members participated in different panels and brought in civil society's point of view, reaching around 600 journalists and 1500 other participants.

Screening of *Cérbh é Colombanus*

On 20 September 2017 at 18:30 in VMA 3, the last film screened in conjunction with the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome will be a BBC production focusing on St. Columbanus, a 6th-century Irish missionary who mapped out Europe before Europe existed by travelling

from country to country to found monasteries. The former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, has travelled through Ireland, France, Austria, Switzerland and Italy and discovered that openness to diversity has many things to teach Europe, which is often divided at present.



Good food label to EESC canteen

The joint EESC-COR canteen has recently been awarded the Good Food label by the Brussels environmental agency for the quality of the food it serves as well as its careful management of food waste. The Bruxelles Environnement newsletter

has published an interview with Silvia Staffa, in charge of the EESC's environmental and catering services, and Catherine Van Ranst, responsible for sustainable food projects at the CoR, which can be read here: <http://bit.ly/2uF7YFI>

The EESC's trainees from the 2017 spring session were given the chance to present the outcome of their report on ***The EU in the media and social media: A youth perspective*** to the EESC's July plenary. The report aims to deliver recommendations to EESC members and EU institutions on how the EU could improve its media and social media strategy to better reach young generations.



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