



*European Economic and Social Committee*

## C.2 REV

**Bureau meeting No** 654  
**Date** 14/11/2017  
**Subject** EESC political priorities for 2018  
FOR DECISION

The Committee will seek to make a major contribution to the **debate on the future of Europe** by putting the **citizen** at the heart of its opinions, publications and activities. It will play to the full its role of "bridge between the EU and civil society" by working **in the Member States**, maintaining its **network** of contacts with **national and European civil society organisations**, systematically advancing **civil and social dialogue** and presenting a narrative that differs from the "institutional" narrative – by placing the emphasis on **listening** and the **actual experience** and aspirations of the public and businesses. 2018 is the last full year of the current term of office of the European Parliament and European Commission. This will give the Committee an opportunity to evaluate the challenges and opportunities of this special year.

The Committee will assume and entrench its role as a **legitimate representative** of organised civil society and as such will be alert to any dissipation of **cohesion, solidarity and trust** and to the advance of all forms of populism in the Member States. It will **combat** such trends through its work and by emphasising the Union's value for its citizens, including capitalising on 2018 being European Year of **Cultural Heritage**, which can help to highlight a common European heritage.

The Committee will closely monitor European **current affairs** – including the Brexit negotiations and the run-up to the **European elections** – and the institutions' **agendas**, paying particular attention to the **Commission's work programme**, the recommendations that the Committee made to it for 2018 and the drafting of the 2019 programme.

European recovery is improving in Europe but the growth is not sufficiently strong and is uneven. The European Union should find ways to enhance long-term sustainable growth for the benefit of all.

The Committee will seek to promote **economic development and social progress**, the creation of more employment, and the **improvement of living and working conditions** and **to address the challenges of globalisation, also in terms of a better match between EU trade policy and the achievements of SDGs**. The European Union should bolster its **cohesion**, ensure **sustainable development** and enhance its competitiveness. This is a particular issue in the context of the **digital transition**, and for anticipating the consequences of this, particularly for the **future of work**. The Union must be solidarity-based, protect its citizens, promote democratic values and ensure that **fundamental rights** are upheld.

The Committee will make its priority the core tasks entrusted to it under the Treaties, namely the drafting of **opinions** for the European institutions – usually at their request. It will also endeavour to raise awareness of its opinions and its other work.

To this end, it will use appropriate resources to **communicate** effectively, especially with citizens and their organisations. It will seek to step up its relations with all the **EU institutions** and to nurture synergies. In particular it will seek to prepare an evaluation of its relations with the European Parliament, the Commission and the Committee of the Regions, with a view to strengthening them.

The Committee will focus its priorities on the eight topics below, which are listed in no particular order of importance. The proposals in italics are just that and must, of course, be decided on by the Committee's relevant bodies.

### **1. Ensuring the fair transition to a digital economy and society**

Among other things, this transition will entail promoting and implementing a smart, sustainable and innovative industrial and services policy, supporting businesses and workers, promoting diverse, new, socially sustainable economic models such as the collaborative or circular economy and meeting the challenges posed by artificial intelligence, which will have an impact on work, services, infrastructure and welfare systems.

*Proposal: Public debates on "Artificial intelligence and the world of work" and "4.0 transformations"*

### **2. Enhancing sustainable growth for the benefit of all**

Stronger and sustainable long-term growth is needed. This can be achieved by fully implementing the Single Market and defending its four freedoms, while combatting protectionism wherever it occurs but also protecting citizens better. Furthermore our economic success depends on encouraging entrepreneurship, attracting investments and enhancing the capacity for innovation as well as developing fair and active trade and fiscal policies, while ensuring a fair distribution of the benefits this generates.

### **3. Promoting the just transition to a low-carbon competitive economy and sustainable energy and mobility**

Sustainable and affordable energy and mobility policies, designed and implemented in line with the Paris climate agreement and the UN sustainable development goals, are at the heart of the current economic and social revolution. The completion of the European Energy Union, leading to a low-carbon and inclusive economy, will benefit all of Europe's stakeholders and citizens. As transport is one of the basic enablers of activities for the whole of society, it also deserves a high profile.

*Proposal: Public debate on "Energy challenges"*

### **4. Guaranteeing and enforcing fundamental rights and the rule of law**

The application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union to all the Union's domestic and foreign policies will guarantee a fair balance between economic freedoms and

fundamental rights in order to better promote our democratic values. In this way, Europe will be seen to be giving people a real added value. It must also do more on democratic values, cohesion of our societies and action to ensure a free and independent civil society, thereby counteracting the shrinking space for civil society organisations.

*Proposal: Public debate on the possibility of creating an EU CSO forum on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights"*

#### **5. Making a success of the changing world of work in a stronger social Europe**

Effective implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights while ensuring the right balance between the economic and social dimensions of the European model is essential in order to guarantee social inclusion, paying special attention to the weakest and the excluded (as a result of poverty, job instability and economic, environmental, industrial and social change). It is also important to give guidance to the necessary reforms in the Member States, focusing on outcomes rather than on “one size fits all” solutions. Anticipating the impact of digitalisation, enhancing competences and productivity, addressing the challenges of the lack of skilled labour and framing a new approach to careers and life-long learning is of key importance. Labour market reforms and innovations must generate new and decent jobs. In this context, the right balance between loss and creation of jobs requires serious consideration. Social dialogue and worker participation must be championed and – finally – the European social model will be preserved.

*Proposal: Public debate on "The future of work" and the renewed social agenda*

#### **6. Promoting an inclusive migration policy as part of an ambitious foreign policy**

Addressing the challenges of the refugee and migration crises means enforcing asylum and legal migration policies in full respect of human rights in order to facilitate the better integration of refugees and migrants, with emphasis on specific support policies corresponding to their needs. Additional issues include focusing EU external policies on the EU's neighbourhood and enlargement policies to the east and the south, with particular reference to the Western Balkans, given the importance this region has in the priorities of the three upcoming presidencies; managing new strategic threats and the consequences of the economic shift towards Asia; and responding to the African demographic challenge.

*Proposal: Ensuring proper visibility and follow-up of the 2018 European migration forum debates with the topic: "Towards a more inclusive labour market for migrants"*

#### **7. Reinforcing social and territorial cohesion with an appropriate EU budget**

Two factors that will boost cohesion and reduce inequality in all its guises are: 1) Introducing urban and rural development policies that promote cohesion, social inclusion and best practice on infrastructure, mobility and intelligent organization of territorial entities (“smart” regions, cities and islands) and 2) linking a reformed agricultural policy with a sustainable food policy.

#### **8. Strengthening EMU**

We need to deepen EU economic, fiscal and financial governance and complete the Economic and Monetary Union for a sustainable and homogeneous Europe, with the number of countries joining the euro area increasing in accordance with their individual readiness for this. We should develop the instruments needed to achieve the common economic and political goals, especially: the Investment Plan for Europe, the banking union, and the capital markets union, a genuine economic and fiscal union, a substantial Multiannual Financial Framework, and an ambitious trade agenda. The Committee's work will contribute to strengthening economic and social cohesion, ensuring upward convergence, economic stability and share prosperity for all Europeans.

*Proposal: Public debate on "The EU's economic and financial future"*

**The Bureau is asked to adopt the EESC's political priorities for 2018, as set out above.**