2019 will be a very challenging year at the European level, with the elections to the European Parliament, the conclusion of the Brexit negotiations, the Sibiu Summit on the future of Europe and a new European Commission to be instated. We as civil society representatives have a key role in ensuring that the EU is more transparent and better understood by citizens. Defending democracy, but also positively influencing the future EU agenda.

We will begin our activities in 2019 with a discussion within our Group on trade, a topic where we have special aims, challenges, fears and proposals to introduce. We will continue with a meeting in Belfast in February, to discuss with our Irish and UK colleagues the Implications of Brexit to Civil Society and the Peace Process. We must maintain close relations with civil society across the Channel, throughout the final phase of the Brexit negotiations and well into our future relationship.

In the first few months of 2019 we will also step up our Communication on the Group III Recommendations on Sibiu, which were adopted in September 2018. In parallel, we will begin preparations for a large-scale event in Bucharest on the subject ‘A Europe of Shared Values and Civil Society’, scheduled for May, just before the Sibiu Summit. This event will complement the findings of a study to be launched by our Group this year, entitled ‘Finding a New Consensus on Civil Society Values and their Evaluation’.

Of course in 2019 we will continue to defend democracy and the key role of civil society in limiting populism in European politics at all levels. Hence, in early 2019 we will publish the final version of the study that we worked on last year in Feldkirch: ‘Societies Outside Metropolises: the role of civil society organisations in facing populism’.

Moreover, this year’s communication strategy, we will stress the pivotal role of education in combatting the proliferation of populism. Not forgetting of course the necessity to stimulate economic growth and to defend against unemployment and poverty. Our study on ‘Youngsters in the EU: perceptions, knowledge and expectations on Europe’ to be published this year, will complement these activities.

Moreover, this year the Diversity Europe Group will bring many new initiatives, with a large-scale event on new European role models for women and men and an event in Finland on the importance of SMEs in agriculture, tourism and the environment, both scheduled for the second half of the year. Mention should also be made of the two Own-initiative Opinions on trade and tourism and a future EU agenda for disability rights that our Group has proposed.

Above all, this year we must rise to the challenge as the direct link between the Institutions and citizens. We are aware of our responsibility to re-energise Europe, to disseminate the benefits of EU Membership, to defend democracy and support an engaged civil society. Let us not forget that the EU needs not only our expertise, but also our engagement, in order to give credibility to the European project of today and tomorrow! We can help make a better Europe, as Europe helps us make our lives better!
The EU spends a lot of time and resources on communicating with its citizens, explaining its policies and its purpose. But this communication has been high on jargon and low on impact. Most Europeans see it as boring, unclear, irrelevant and often do not understand what is happening in Brussels. The reasons are numerous and I am not going to focus on them.

How can we make the failing communications of the EU succeed? Here are some proposals:

First, we should make EU communication a strategic and absolute priority.

Second, we should communicate Europe at both EU and national levels. Communicating in true partnership is extremely important. It needs to be based on common values, political will, transparency and honesty. The key players should operate on an equal footing. And involving the EU institutions, Member States, civil society and the media is a must. They would commit themselves to presenting the EU as a useful brand, an entity that is seeking to work with citizens and make a meaningful difference in their daily lives. The message should be adapted to the local identity of each country and region.

Last but not least, we should send out a message of EU unity and power: the EU should show that it is coming out of all its crises and focusing on what matters to people. We should show EU citizens that a united Europe is relevant and beneficial. We should tell EU citizens that Europe delivers, that Europe shares their concerns, that Europe could solve their problems. This is how we build trust. Because when trust is high, communication is easy, instant, and effective.
How to Communicate YOUR Europe

Philippe FELIX, digital strategist and trainer

Klaus WELLE, Secretary-General of the European Parliament

Alfred GAJDOSIK (EESC) and Anne-Marie SIGMUND (EESC)

Arno METZLER (EESC) and Sixtine BOUYGUES, Deputy Director-General for Communication at the European Commission

Thierry LIBAERT (EESC) and Jane MORRICE (EESC)

Mina ANDREEVA, Deputy Chief Spokeswoman of the Juncker Commission; Inga ROSINSKA, Director of Information & Outreach at the Council of the European Union; Klaus WELLE, Secretary-General of the European Parliament

Pavel TRANTINA (EESC)
As the European elections approach, the political parties are set to roll out their black and white rhetoric – for or against Europe – and the European Parliament will again, as every five years, launch an institutional advertising campaign that is out of touch with the public’s perceptions, like the inconsistent Act. React. Impact of 2014.

If we really want to interest our fellow-citizens in the EU project, we need to take a closer look at how we communicate. A number of recommendations can be made. They begin with a rigorous assessment of the situation.

It should be borne in mind that all communication starts with listening, and assessing situations and representations, and that one of the basic lessons of communication is to distinguish the identity of an organisation and its image.

(…)

The European narrative should express the shared aspiration for a quality of life that incorporates the social and environmental dimensions.

Europe was born out of an objective and an idea. The objective was peace: this idea is ubiquitous in the founding text; nobody can deny that this objective has been attained. The idea was that to create a people’s Europe, one had to start by ‘creating de facto solidarity’. Born out of coal and steel, in 1951, Europe then took the form of the European Economic Community. It was not until 1993 that the idea of the Common Market gave way to that of the Union. The hypothesis proved unfounded: economic agreements could never create a sense of belonging. Worse, the economic difficulties have given rise to an increased climate of mistrust. And populists have been able to effectively seize on the argument of a costly Europe from the moment when, focusing on the purely economic aspect, each Member State’s contribution to the EU budget was greater than EU investments in its country, and thus the European Union could be seen as not profitable for that country. Brexit boiled down to this financial calculation, which was wrong as acknowledged by Nigel Farage, the leader of Brexit.

It is time to explore the possibility of a new European narrative. With the collapse of the iron curtain, the pursuit of peace can no longer be the driving force of integration. 75 years after the end of the Second World War, nobody envisages a new conflict between Member States.

15 000 lobbyists promote their interests in Brussels. How many are there promoting Europe in their regions?

The European narrative must be underpinned by values that bring together and enable identification. Europe was the home of the industrial revolution and went on to put in place protection mechanisms: half of global social spending goes on 500 million Europeans. Our continent is the most progressive on global warming, artistic freedom, and development aid. It is open to the world, but to regulated, civilised, and protective globalisation. The new European narrative should incorporate the aspiration to a quality of life that does not come about to the detriment of the social and environmental aspect. This is one of the most widely shared expectations in Europe. The idea must be promoted of a European wellbeing as an objective of the Europe we want.

Some 6 000 French people work for the EU: if each of them were to speak at a school, company or association, this would help to demystify the work of the institutions.

Europe was born from the minds a few exceptional individuals without the people and civil society organisations having an involvement. The Citizens’ Initiative was introduced only in 2012, after the Lisbon Treaty, with excessive implementation constraints. The Europe that the founding fathers dreamt of was a union of European nations; it now needs to be a union of Europeans, and its values must be embodied in its current aspirations.

Trust is often proportional to proximity. The expression we often hear “That was decided in Brussels” reflects the perception of an undemocratic process removed from people’s
real concerns. Some 15 000 lobbyists work in Brussels to promote the interests of their profession. How many lobbyists are working to promote Europe in their regions? The relationship to Europe appears unilateral. The European Commission has sought to launch a “citizens’ dialogue” scheme and its president has encouraged the Commissioners to be present on the ground.

Conveying the image on the ground of a Europe of proximity, anchored in local realities.

The European Economic and Social Committee launched a pioneering initiative in 2008 with its “going local” scheme to encourage each of its 350 members, including its 24 French members, to present their activities within the organisations of the EU. Some 6 000 French people work in the EU institutions, with more than half of them in the European Commission; if each of them, even once a year, were to visit a school, business or association to speak about what they do, this would help to demystify the work of the institutions. While the new European narrative must come from a central body, it must above all be relayed at grassroots level. Going back to the local level is a prerequisite for disseminating the image of a Europe rooted in local realities, a Europe of proximity.

Up against Euroscepticism, communication cannot remedy a failure of structure or governance.

But what must come first is having an accurate understanding of communication and its powers. Euroscepticism is not the result of poor communication. If Europe is our common home, its foundations are obsolete: its architects and plans are unknown to us, we do not yet know how many people will live in it and the very idea of building a roof is constantly postponed. Communication can promote a new dynamic, reduce misconceptions, increase the relation of proximity and trust; however, it cannot remedy a failure of structure or governance.

Why vote in the European election in May 2019?

As Europeans we face many challenges, from migration to climate change, from youth unemployment to data privacy. We live in an ever more globalised, competitive world. At the same time, the Brexit referendum has demonstrated that the EU is not an irrevocable project. And while most of us take democracy for granted, it also seems under increasing threat, both in principle and practice.

That’s why we have started building a community of supporters to help encourage a higher voter turnout at the European Elections.
Brexit presents many challenges to the EU and Great Britain. They revolve around Trade, movement of people, the change in regulations and regulatory systems and their impacts on the daily lives of all EU citizens. This will affect shared research programmes, existing and in the future, which in turn will affect how our universities function, particularly those who have long standing arrangements with institutions across the EU and will change how students of the future, make their decisions. For civil society the challenges will hinge in its capacity to strengthen the principles and values that underline the EU, while being able to learn from policies that have failed to deliver the necessary outcomes.

The loss of a valuable member such as the UK means that despite the current difficulties in negotiating withdrawal terms, it will be incumbent on both sides to ensure that suitable arrangements between them will be developed. Otherwise the many gains won by civil society co-operation since 1973, when Great Britain joined the union will be lost.

The specific challenges to Ireland and the historic international peace agreement are particularly difficult and because of that it can be argued, represent the greatest test facing the EU since its foundation. This is why Diversity Europe Group 3 will return to Belfast on February 15th 2019 with the aim of exploring the realities experienced by communities on the front line of peace; communities who have paid an enormous price because of the violence of over 30 years and who are now facing huge uncertainty as a result of Brexit.

Since the peace agreement; the EU has largely funded the necessary peace infrastructure and so therefore have a huge stake in the ongoing peace project. Brexit is of course challenged by the fact that it is the only land border between the EU and the UK. Historically such a border has been extremely sensitive to communities of Nationalist and Unionist persuasions. It was a major part of the peace agreement, which in effect made it invisible by using the customs union’s freedom of movement to ensure that there could be no border checking facilities built and that movement of people and goods would occur seamlessly.

The February event will once again demonstrate Diversity Europe’s commitment to impress on all stakeholders concerned that extreme caution, must be used so that the peace process is preserved and that communities can remain committed to peace without unnecessary destabilization.

It also raises questions for Diversity Europe Group 3 members and all EESC members. Coming from civil society, often on the front line, EESC members cannot be separated from the many concerns and issues
The narrative explaining why the establishment of the European Union as a bulwark against war, prejudice, racism and inequality, is often used to remind us of the horrors of the last century and the huge feeling that the Europe of that time must never exist again. Sadly, listening to some of the hate entering public discourse, there is always the possibility that history repeats. Yet over dependence on this narrative as a means of justifying the union may suggest that citizens take it for granted, or even worse have gone beyond the horrors. Equally the challenges faced by citizens in terms of beating poverty, the barriers faced by people because of a range of social disadvantage, has led to criticism that the EU leadership has stop listening and worst still has developed no thought out solutions. Donald Tusk President of the European Council says “Obsessed with the idea of instant and total integration, we failed to notice that ordinary people, the citizens of Europe, do not share our Euro-enthusiasm.”

In the final period of 2018, the EESC has passed a number of, mainly technical opinions, on such issues as energy and transport including shipping. These opinions present us with a snapshot of the amount of legislation that will have to be amended, significantly changed or completely re written over the coming months. All of this activity is aimed at normalizing the reality that the UK one of the largest members of the Union will become what is called a third country and therefore adapt all of its interaction with the EU to reflect this. Changes in regulation will pose problems affecting the supply and demand of all goods, including sensitive goods such as medical supplies, essential life and death equipment and of course core skills.

With all its uncertainties and controversies, Brexit is still on schedule to occur on March 29th, 2019. Of course that can change. The date could be delayed or the withdrawal agreement changed to take account of problems needing more time for solution, or the withdrawal agreement fails in the House of commons and there is the ‘appalling vista’ of a no deal agreement. For civil society the implications of Brexit demonstrates that its leaders, some who are members of Diversity Europe Group 3 will need to embrace thoroughly the vision of the EU as stated by its founders. We are not apologists for the EU. Instead we are its promoters and defenders; while at the same time insisting that civil society will always get a meaningful say in polices proposed, and particularly on how they are implemented.
Romanian Presidency - challenges and opportunities

It is on 1 January 2019 that Romania takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time. Some say that the next six months represent a turning point for the European Union as a whole, while others go even further and think that if the EU is not going to reform quickly and take long-term binding decisions, its future might be jeopardised.

Romania has set four priorities, trying to build on what seems to have been lost and seeking a common constructive path forward:

- A Europe of convergence
- A safer Europe
- Europe, a stronger global actor
- A Europe of common values

The Romanian Presidency is a challenge first of all because in Sibiu in May 2019 the European Union’s leaders have to take an important decision regarding the future of the EU. Of course, it is up to the Member States to determine the road they want to follow, but we need to have a Europe ready to make a joint decision, with specific rules, agreed by all and following a long-term development strategy in an ever-challenging economic and political environment. The path forward could take several routes, but one thing is clear: if Europe wants to build on what it has already achieved (and it has achieved a lot!), the only way forward is together, jointly, sharing the risks that lie in front of us but also accepting internal and external challenges.

Then, at the end of March 2019, during the Romanian Presidency, the United Kingdom is set to leave the European Union. This is an unprecedented moment in EU history, with one of the largest Member States, with over 60 million inhabitants, leaving the single market. Although some are still expecting a reverse decision, Brexit represents a major challenge for the Romanian Presidency and we have to be prepared for all the possible scenarios.

Together with the decision on the Future of Europe, negotiations are ongoing on what is maybe the most important topic on the Council of the European Union Agenda during the Romanian Presidency: The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027, which actually means finalising the legislative, technical and political negotiations for the budget of the European Union.

On top of all this, European Parliament elections will take place at the end of May 2019, also during the Romanian Presidency. With some anticipating gains for populist parties and some also wondering about external interference, the European elections will decide the future composition of the European Parliament, which will have a reduced number of parliamentarians thanks to the loss of the UK MEPs.

Despite all the challenges ahead, Romania has made thorough preparations and is looking forward to a successful Presidency. With unity and a joint effort, this Presidency might be remembered as the turning point in the life of the European Union, the moment when political leaders and citizens alike decided to go forward together, accepting that we are not all the same, but that we can only achieve everlasting progress together. The European Economic and Social Committee has an important role to play in the whole of this process and, as always, is ready and motivated to deliver and to promote the views of organised civil society for a better future for the European Union and its citizens.
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DECEMBER PLENARY SESSION
Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Elżbieta SZADZIŃSKA (PL) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “The annual Union work programme for European standardisation for 2019” – INT/878

Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (ES) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Investment Plan for Europe: stock-taking and next steps” – ECO/486

Juraj SIPKO (SK) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Towards a stronger international role of the euro” – ECO/489

Arnaud SCHWARTZ (FR) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “A more constructive role for civil society in implementing environmental law” – NAT/759

Cillian LOHAN (IE) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Reflection Paper Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030” – NAT/760

Séamus BOLAND (IE) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Adapting EU energy efficiency legislation in the light of Brexit” – TEN/686

Pavel TRANTINA (CZ) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Action Plan against Disinformation” – TEN/687

Giuseppe GUERINI (IT) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Blockchain and distributed ledger technology as an ideal infrastructure for Social Economy” – INT/880

Debate with Mr TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President of the EU Commission, in charge of Better Regulation, Inter-Institutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights

The full listing of membership of the study groups for the new work may be consulted here: https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/news/new-works-december-2018
Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

The last plenary meeting of the EESC in 2018 took place in Brussels on 12 and 13 December. Frans Timmermans, the first vice-president of the European Commission responsible for better lawmaking, interinstitutional relations, the rule of law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, was invited to the meeting and discussed with the EESC plenary a sustainable Europe until 2030. He also presented the results of a high-level stakeholder forum that the Commission had held on this topic.

In addition, the issue of respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights in the EU Member States was addressed by EESC Group III President Arno Metzler, who requested that the Committee and the Commission work together more closely in these areas. This was welcomed and endorsed by the Commissioner.

“Rule of Law, the rule of law will take care of you.”

EU-Chile

On 6 and 7 December 2018, the third meeting of the EU-Chile Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), established by the EU-Chile Association Agreement, was held in Santiago de Chile. The members discussed topics of interest for both parties, such as investment and cooperation, decent work and the informal economy, the Sustainable Development Agenda and proposals to reinforce the role of the Joint Consultative Committee. They also adopted a declaration on these four topics.

The JCC is made up of eighteen members, nine from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and nine from Chilean civil society organisations. It is co-chaired by Josep Puxeu Rocamora, EESC member, and Roberto Zúñiga Belaúzará, Director of the National Confederation of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (CONAPYME).

Group III members Mrs Heinisch, Mr Joost and Mr Ribbe took an active part in the discussions, as well as in the bilateral meetings on 5 December at the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Economy, and at the working lunch with the EU ambassador. Mr Ribbe presented the document on Sustainable Development Goals and Mr Joost chaired the panel on the Future role of the EU-Chile JCC.

New Deal for Consumers

Co-organised by the EESC and the European Commission as a follow-up to the Consumer Dialogues, the Consumer Summit “Les Assises des Consommateurs” showcased the results of the outreach to the 27 Member States and offered the opportunity for debate and conclusions. This event brought together the expertise of representatives from the Civil Society, National Authorities, Academia as well as consumer and business organisations and citizens. Being the conclusive event of the National Consumer Dialogues, “Les Assises des Consommateurs” was organised to allow participants from these Dialogues to present their views and provided a platform to tackle the challenges of Consumer.

During the panel on ‘Future priorities for European Consumer protection - Challenges ahead’, Baiba MILTOVIĆA addresses the audience on Civil Society Perspective.

The closing remarks were made by Ariane RODERT, President of the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, EESC.
EU strengthens cooperation with civil society from the Southern Mediterranean region during the EU-Majalat Civil Society Forum 2018

From 20 – 21 November, the EU-Majalat Civil Society Forum 2018 took place at the EESC in Brussels. This multi-stakeholder event aimed at further strengthening the dialogue between the EU and civil society from the Southern Mediterranean region.

The EU-Majalat Civil Society Forum 2018 brought together representatives of the EU and NGOs, trade unions, business associations, think-tanks and practitioners mainly from the EU’s Southern Neighbourhood partner countries.

As stated by Mrs. SLAVOVA during her intervention:

“A true dialogue means that any issues should be open to discussion between the EU institutions and civil society. Our day-to-day work at the EESC shows that it can be a frustrating process; we would often like to see more action taken based on our recommendations.

This is not always possible. Sometimes the political will is not there or Member States will not agree on certain sensitive political issues, reducing the options for action at EU level, or there is no funding. I am sure you have heard this in your work at national level.

As you know, it is an incremental process, step by step through dialogue, constructive criticism, the sharing of experience and good practices and consensus building. In this process, I see the fact that CSOs are now in charge of the Majalat as a step in the right direction. The EESC welcomes the commitment of the European Commission and the EEAS – an important one – and wishes every success to the organisers of the Majalat consortium, which are already working very hard on this project and will be doing so in the years to come.

May this project become a true instrument of dialogue between the EU and civil society in the Mediterranean region.”

In June 2018, Nicolas Hulot and Brune Poirson commissioned from me a report aimed at drafting acceptable recommendations to increase the sustainability of products.

I wanted this mission letter to be signed jointly by the Minister of the Economy in charge of consumer affairs, but this could not be achieved and my mission, originally scheduled to start in March, finally began only on June 21 2018.

Five years after my opinion was produced and unanimously adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee, I am more than ever convinced that there can be no sustainable development without sustainable consumption and that the subject of product sustainability must find its rightful place in a circular economy that has focused too long on recycling waste.

After meeting more than fifty interlocutors from all walks of life for six months and analysing a large number of studies that I wanted mainly to be as academic and objective as possible, I was able to highlight the very large number of beneficial effects of increased product life on purchasing power, employment, environmental impact and greenhouse gas emissions, business reputation, trade balance and other areas.

At the end of my study, I made fifty recommendations for increased product durability.

It is now up to the government to draw the consequences and enable the maximum number of consumers to take a constructive role in the ecological and solidarity transition.


A quarter of a century of good cooperation with EuroNatur

On Wednesday September 26, Lutz Ribbe, director of environmental policy at EuroNatur, received the Honorary Badge of the Podlaskie Voivodship, awarded to him by the Board of the Podlaskie Voivodship, from the hands of the Deputy Marshal of the Podlaskie Voivodship, Maciej Żywno.

The award ceremony took place in the Podlaskie Village Museum at a meeting on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of cooperation between the region and the EuroNatur foundation.

After the award, Deputy Marshal Maciej Żywno said: “Many thanks for the years of knowledge, passion for environmental protection and renewable energy sources. Congratulations to Lutz Ribbe on receiving the Honorary Badge of the Podlaskie Voivodship. It was a pleasure to present this award and to work together with those who have been collaborating with the EuroNatur Foundation for years, and to remember and plan the steps ahead.”

Lutz Ribbe joined EuroNatur in 1992 and took the position of Director of the Department of Nature Conservation Policy. Together with the managing director, Gabriel Schwaderer, he runs the foundation and determines the organisation’s final political stance and position on nature protection.

From 2013, Lutz Ribbe also chaired the EESC’s Sustainable Development Observatory. In addition to conservation work, he manages several EuroNatur projects in Poland. His special area of interest and work is Podlaskie Voivodship. It also places emphasis on ecological and socially responsible regional development.
Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

Pavel TRANTINA (CZ)
Czech Council of Children and Youth
Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group

Mission report
Klaipėda (Lithuania) will become
European Youth Capital 2021

Group III Vice-President Pavel Trantina decided on this award together with representatives of 13 other EU institutions and Europe-wide organisations in November. This independent, high-level jury, convened by the European Youth Forum, selected Klaipėda from a shortlist of five finalist cities. The other finalists for EYC 2021 were (in alphabetical order): Chișinău (Moldova), Greater Nicosia (Cyprus), Varaždin (Croatia) and Yaroslavl (Russia).

Klaipėda will hold the title for one year, during which it will have the chance to showcase innovative ideas, projects and activities designed to empower young people, boost youth participation and strengthen European identity.

This year marked the 10th anniversary of the European Youth Capital and the organisers – European Youth Forum – is proud to see the continued positive impact of young people who have shaped and transformed their cities all across Europe. They have summed-up the experience in a publication entitled European Youth Capital: Ten years of boosting vibrant youthful cities.

Pavel Trantina: “Klaipėda impressed me and my colleagues in the European Youth Capital jury with its belief in the undiscovered potential of young people and its efforts to include marginalised groups in all aspects of city life. At the same time, the civil society organisations are trying to tackle the brain-drain and to make the city a good place for the young generation to stay and live.”

More information about the report:

Tom JONES (UK)
Wales Council Voluntary Action
Member of the Diversity Europe Group

#EuropeForCulture

On 7 December, Tom Jones participated in the closing conference of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018

The European Year of Cultural Heritage has successfully raised public awareness, disseminated examples of good practice and promoted policy debate, research and innovation on cultural heritage. At the end of the Year, the conference #EuropeForCulture highlighted projects, innovative methods of cultural education and promising partnerships for cultural heritage. The discussion of policy developments in cultural heritage illustrated success stories and future challenges.

The main focus was on the legacy of the European Year of Cultural Heritage and the question “What remains from the European Year?” with the aim of establishing ideas for an ongoing commitment to the goals of the European Year and making use of synergies in the future cultural policies of the EU.

In his panel on cultural heritage and sustainable development, Tom Jones specifically discussed urban planning and Baukultur, sustainable tourism and the safeguarding of cultural landscapes to contribute substantially to sustainable development and, thus, to the objectives of the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

Year of Cultural Heritage. The working group also discussed sustainable management of cultural heritage and culture’s contribution to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Tom Jones concluded: “For now, the front seat belongs to the Austrian Presidency, faced with the vital challenge of capturing the best of this Year’s efforts, to capitalise on new and existing people commitments. It needs clear conclusions about success and failures, ensuring that policy and investment at a European level matches the aspirations of its citizens to protect, to promote and learn from our cultural heritage.”

Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Renate HEINISCH (DE)
Federal Association of German Senior Citizens’ Organisations
Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Renate Heinisch communicating Europe at home

On 16 November last year, Renate Heinisch attended a conference in Stuttgart dealing with antisemitism in Europe.

The speakers were Johannes Jung, responsible for European integration and cooperation on the rule of law at Baden-Württemberg’s Ministry of Justice and European Affairs, and Dr Michael Blume from the State Ministry in Stuttgart, who is responsible for combating antisemitism.

Mr Jung gave a detailed account of the forms of group-focused enmity. There was antisemitism in every European country, he said, and it was being deployed selectively in all its shades – religious anti-Judaism, classical antisemitism and rehashed anti-Zionism – by political groups and sometimes by members of governments. We had it in all its forms in the European Union. The bad news: it would clearly never stop. The good news: the public was more aware and more vigilant. It was important, the speaker urged, not to downplay antisemitic incidents. Antisemitism was always the start. Attacks on Jews were quickly followed by attacks on other minorities and on those who took their side. “Democracy demands responsibility and needs consideration for all groups of our society.”

Dr Michael Blume sought to raise awareness of the consequences of conspiracy theories, pointing to dissemination via the web, which can act as an accelerator. He too warned against trivialising antisemitism.

“Remembrance and prevention do not need a long journey. There are places of commemoration and warning before our very doors” – a call to all of us at the EESC.
At its Plenary session on 12-13 December 2018 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs.

Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT)
Associação para a Defesa dos Consumidores
Member of the Diversity Europe Group

**INT/872 - Application of Articles 107 and 108 TFEU to certain categories of horizontal State aid**

The EESC:
- finds the proposal necessary and fitting as part of a whole raft of new proposals related in particular to the next Multiannual Financial Framework, since it is an instrument crucial to the efficient operation of many of the measures envisaged in these new initiatives. It makes a decisive contribution to ensuring that the Commission plays a strong role in the selection of supported projects in accordance with a common EU interest, and that public support will complement private investment in a fully transparent manner.
- therefore agrees with and endorses this new Commission proposal, and also thinks it a good idea to encourage the interested parties concerned to follow the guidelines in the code of best practice.

Baiba MILTOVIČA (LV)
Latvian National Association for Consumer Protection
Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group

**INT/868 - Report on Competition Policy 2017**

The EESC:
- believes that the reinforcement of NCAs’ autonomy and the provision of adequate resources is vital. Genuine independence, expertise and training are necessary for effective work, and the ECN+ Directive should be closely monitored to see that this is achieved;
- supports the Commission in the area of private legal enforcement of the competition rules and argues that class actions should be facilitated by the legal systems of all Member States;
- believes that further proposals on franchising, to be included in the Block Exemption Regulation in order to restore the commercial and contractual balance between franchisees and the franchisor, should be considered.

Ákos TOPOLÁNSZKY (HU)
Magyar Drogtérápiás Intézetek Szövetsége (MADRISZ)
Member of the Diversity Europe Group

**SOC/585 - The situation of Roma women**

A large number of Roma women and girls continue to face multiple discrimination in various areas, ranging from health to employment and education, amongst others. They also have limited opportunities to influence the policies that most concern them. The EESC emphasises the importance of their involvement, with programmes aimed at Roma women foreseeing a majority of Roma women in their planning and implementation. The EESC calls for an end to segregated education and for the abolition of health practices which infringe ethical standards. Health information points, health mediators and legislative measures for the provision of health care for Roma without basic health insurance are amongst the EESC’s recommendations aimed at upholding the Roma’s right to healthcare. On the issue of forced sterilisations, the EESC proposes the extension or the abolition of the limitation period for the prosecution of this offence.

Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (LT)
Agricultural Cooperative /LT Chamber of Agriculture
Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group

**CCMI/160 - Opportunities for sustainable EU bio-economy**

The EESC:
- introduces a long-term, coherent and transparent policy and incentive framework to promote the bioeconomy.
- The role of farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives is crucial to ensure an efficient use of natural resources and contribute to a circular bioeconomy.
- Support market creation and help consumers and the public to make informed choices about the products and industries they support through their daily purchases.
- Provide a sustainable financial return on investments through a one-stop-shop fund.
At its Plenary session on 12-13 December 2018 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs.

**Cristian PîRVULESCU (RO)**  
Pro-Democracy Association  
Member of the Diversity Europe Group  
REX/508 - Neighbourhood, Development and Cooperation Instrument and Nuclear Safety Cooperation Instrument

The European Economic and Social Committee supports the general and specific objectives of the proposal and considers that the move to streamline the instruments used in relation to neighbourhood and third countries is welcome and useful. The EU must build a constructive, realistic and pragmatic relationship with the neighbourhood and third countries, in which values should remain central.

The Committee notes the determination of the Commission and the other European institutions and the Member States, to support the development of civil society, democracy and human rights protection systems. The functioning of the new consolidated instrument should be, in all the phases, from planning to monitoring and evaluation, geared to promote EU values, including the rule of law, integrity, pluralism, democracy and protection of human rights.

In this context, the Committee urges the European Commission to significantly increase the allocation for the human rights and democracy, and civil society thematic programmes.

**Pavel TRANTINA (CZ)**  
Czech Council of Children and Youth  
Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group  
SOC/574 - The costs of non-immigration (and non-integration)

The EESC:
- considers that immigration has a positive influence on population and labour force growth. If natural population growth becomes negative, immigration can help keep the total population and labour force constant;
- points out that a non-immigration scenario in Europe would mean among other things that:
  - Member States’ economies would suffer substantially; job markets would come under possibly irreconcilable strain, whole industries would go bust, agricultural production would drop, construction would not be able to keep up with demand;
  - Demographic challenges would be aggravated; pension systems might become unsustainable, the health and care sector could collapse, depopulation of certain areas would proceed at a swift pace.

**Ronny LANNOO (BE)**  
UNIZO organisation of SMEs & independent professionals  
Member of the Diversity Europe Group  
INT/854 - Retail sector

The EESC stresses the economic and social importance of the retail sector for all stakeholders and for society as a whole. It considers that the defence and promotion of diversity in the retail sector is crucial in order to meet consumers’ needs and to defend and promote the European productive system.

The EESC notes that the Commission’s proposal focuses too much on “price” as the most interesting element for consumers, to the detriment of other key aspects such as information, product quality and personalisation, proximity, mobility, the circular economy and durability, value for money and service received before or after purchase.

**Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (LT)**  
Agricultural Cooperative /LT Chamber of Agriculture  
Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group  
NAT/723 - Water reuse

The EESC welcomes this proposed regulation as a useful addition in realising the intentions of the Water Framework Directive and also as contributing to the Circular Economy Package. It will encourage existing water resources to be used more sustainably and increase consumer confidence in the safety of those agricultural products affected.

At present consumers are unaware of the varying standards on water reuse and many are unaware that reclaimed water is widely used in irrigation. As this regulation provides for a consistent approach based on strong scientific advice, it can be seen as a necessary foundation block in food safety policy.
In the light of the recent events in 2018 with the Facebook/Cambridge Analytica case concerning the alleged unlawful processing of personal data, the EESC supports the objectives of the Commission proposal and agrees that democracy is one of the fundamental values on which the EU is founded.

The EESC recognises that in today’s world technological developments, social media and the storing of personal data by companies throughout the EU are a given and calls for action that protects the citizens of the EU, allows for transparency and the protection of citizens’ fundamental human rights.

The EESC welcomes the purpose of the Environmental Implementation Review (EIR), which is to provide an informed picture of where each Member State stands, identifying their main shortcomings in implementing EU environmental legislation, as well as to recommend remedial measures and to provide support to those Member States lagging behind in terms of implementation, in particular through a new peer-to-peer tool for technical assistance.

In its opinion on this subject however, the EESC considers that the EU EIR reveals that poor, fragmented and uneven implementation of the EU environmental legislation is a serious problem in many EU Member States. Both now as in the past, behind the root causes of poor implementation identified in the EIR there still appears to be a lack of political will on the part of many Member State governments to make substantial improvement a political priority and to provide sufficient resources (e.g. through the multiannual financial framework – MFF).
Meetings with the national delegations of the Diversity Europe Group

On 11 July, I began my round of meetings with the various national delegations. In July, I had the opportunity to discuss with the Italian delegation.

On 19 and 20 September I had the honour to meet with the French delegation and with our colleagues from Benelux.

In October 2018 I met with the Romanian delegation, and we discussed extensively our event in Romania on 8 May 2019, entitled ‘A Europe of shared values and civil society’.

During this first month of 2019, I will meet with the Polish and then the Spanish Delegation. We will discuss the activities of 2018 and their expectations for 2019.

The next meeting of the “Farmers” Category is scheduled for Monday 25 February 2019. The meeting will focus on “The implications of Brexit for European Agriculture”.

On 13 February a Consumers and Environment Category meeting will take place. Amongst other topics, a debate on following questions will take place: “How have consumers and the environment benefitted from the European Union & what are the gaps, challenges and concerns for the future?”.