



European Economic and Social Committee

Europe III

The voice of
Diversity Europe Group
July 2019

ED Editorial



Arno METZLER (DE)
President of the
Diversity Europe Group

Dear colleagues and friends,

The elections to the European Parliament are over. Citizens have spoken. Now it is time for legislators to act upon citizens' aspirations, hopes and demands. Now it is also the time for civil society to ask the right questions, to make concrete proposals and to help the politicians to develop joint efforts to serve the needs and emotions of the European citizens. Organized civil society has campaigned for participation in the elections. Now it is time to structure the future of our Europe. We are continuously working as Group III on the routines and on special long-running thematic approaches.

In Autumn we will for example tackle the elements of the equality problem and we will try to add new ideas to get away from the best-known blaming and shaming approach which has not given us great progress in that field. The idea of the planned conference is to develop and discuss **"New Role Models for civil society"**. The aim is to start discussion about practical approaches. We want to overcome the present blockade situation. **Women and children poverty gender pay gap** etc. as proposed for discussion from some members will be subject to a conference in Spring managed by my vice-president Séamus Boland.

To the 'New Role Models' you will be kindly invited on 12th of November to come up with your contributions. We hope to create the maximum of added value.

Another project with added value which will arise is the **'European Family Parliament'**. I promote this **to bridge the gap of a missing European family policy.** With the proposal I follow the best practice of the **European**

Rural Parliament initiative, launched by Staffan Nilsson, the former Group III president and the NAT Section president of that time Dilyana Slavova. This event is still going strong after more than 6 years' of annual meetings and fruitful discussions.

Dear colleagues, summer 2019 is the holiday break before the discussions for renewal. Internally in Group III and in the EESC as such, the foreseen Members begin to campaign for posts for the first half of the mandate 2020-2025. Group I - the Group which can propose the next EESC president, informed us that it will be January and March 2020 to choose their candidates. Group III will discuss soon what is suitable for us as a time frame. **Summer break has always been a good moment to reflect about the achievements of the ongoing year and to look forward to Autumn and Winter 2019.**

January to July has been very busy. **With our Extraordinary meeting in Bucharest we approached the actual problems of civil society organizations directly. With the Extraordinary Group III meeting in Finland in September, we will cover competitiveness – 3 pillars for sustainable growth.** Another field of European competences where Group III is highly active.

In this first half of the year **we finalized the study on populism** and presented it to the media. Populism in rural areas is an ongoing



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discussion in the Committee. We still have requests for the study from journalists and scientists. As well we published in the first half **the study of EU expectations from the youth** and we had a well-attended press conference. **This has shown us that we have placed this to the pulse of the day. Not to forget Fridays for Future young citizens' initiative.**

Dear colleagues, from my point of view, we can be happy with the achievements of the first half of the year. Internally I would like to propose a more open discussion for the next 6 months. If you have complaints to address or proposals for improvements, please let me know. For the start into summer holidays I am sending you my best wishes to enter into a relaxed phase for August.

Hope to see you back in Brussels in September in good shape and relaxed!

Yours sincerely,
Arno Metzler
President of the Diversity Europe Group



OUR NEXT EXTRAORDINARY GROUP MEETING IN FINLAND

Boosting EU Competitiveness Three Pillars for Sustainable Growth

On 16 and 17 September, our group will host its extraordinary meeting in Helsinki.

The first day will be dedicated to a conference on the topic *'Boosting EU Competitiveness - Three Pillars for Sustainable Growth'* at the premises of the Auditorium in the Annex Building of the Parliament.

In line with the priorities of Finland's Programme for its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, *'Sustainable Europe – Sustainable Future'*, our Group chose to concentrate on **3 pillars** enabling sustainable growth and thus boosting EU competitiveness:

- **Bioeconomy and climate neutral Europe**
- **Digitalization**
- **Infrastructure in transport sector**

The main purpose is to examine ways of increasing EU competitiveness through three panels on these themes. The panels will be set up with balanced participation of business representatives, experts, officials and EESC Members in order to reach fruitful and lively discussions. The session will be opened by keynote speeches by officials, representatives of the Finnish government and Parliament and of main background organizations of our Group III Finnish Members.



On the second day a study trip to countryside venues nearby Helsinki related to sustainable forest management and logistics in the Finnish forestry sector will be organized.

Stay tuned for more information!

SUSTAINABLE EUROPE
– SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
Finland's Presidency Programme
Presidency of the Council of the European Union
1 July – 31 December 2019

EU2019FI

More information on the Finnish priorities:
<https://eu2019.fi/documents/11707387/14346258/EU2019FI-EU-puheenjohtajakauden-ohjelma-en.pdf/3556b7f1-16df-148c-6f59-2b2816611b36/EU-2019FI-EU-puheenjohtajakauden-ohjelma-en.pdf.pdf>

HIGHLIGHTS

Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) is the rapporteur working alone for the study group for the opinion "Motor vehicles – emissions from light passenger and commercial vehicles – repair and maintenance information" (amendment) – **INT/888**

Patricia CÍREZ MIQUELEIZ (Group I, ES), **Rudy DE LEEUW (Group II, BE)**, **Lutz RIBBE (Group III, DE)** are the rapporteurs for the Ad hoc group – contribution to the Commission's work programme - **GAH BUR**

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL) is the president for this Ad hoc group



The full listing of membership of the above study groups for the new works may be consulted here:
<http://europa.eu/!XT97CK>



OF THE JUNE PLENARY SESSION

Debate with Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič

At the last June Plenary session, Commissioner and Vice-President responsible for the Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič took part in a debate with the Members of the EESC on a **Strategy for long-term EU greenhouse gas emissions reduction**.

Through the Energy Union project, the Commission has developed a **vision for a carbon-neutral Europe**. Mr Šefčovič stated: *"We have proven that we don't need to choose between economic growth and climate. It is possible to grow our economy (by 58%) and cut emissions at the same time (by 22%)."*

"We promised to provide Europe with energy that is secure, sustainable, competitive as well as affordable. Now we can say that we have achieved not only this, but so much more. We have kick-started a deep transformation and modernisation of our economies", he added, referring to decentralised and decarbonised energy production and consumption, infrastructure deployment, and smart technologies.

During the debate, four of our Members took the floor: **Ms Miltoviča, Mr Boland, Mr Trias Pintó** and **Mr Tainen**.



Ms Baiba Miltoviča (Group III)

Vice-President Baiba Miltoviča urged to pay attention to **social concerns** and to **new initiatives in energy-related tax matters**. She referred to **fairness of transition** and **energy poverty**. She stressed on the need of a common definition of energy poverty that would cover all the EU Member States. *'This might make us - as consumers' organizations - move forward with initiatives at national and municipality levels'*, she concluded.

Watch her full intervention here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTic4UbJMF4>



Mr Séamus Boland (Group III)

Vice-President Séamus Boland referred to taxation which is affecting more and more people. *'If you have a large section of the population who cannot afford the transition it is not correct to blame their behavior on populism or joining extreme movements. They join those movements not because*

they like them or even love them, but because these are the only movements expressing their fears. So I would ask you strongly to impress a strategy on fairness and particularly fighting poverty', he noted. He added that transport infrastructure in rural regions is a major problem that will bring costs to people living in those regions and that is not fully addressed in the policy. He also called for each country to have a **summit on climate change** of its own.

Watch his full intervention here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhLaw162NA4>



Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič



Mr Trias Pintó highlighted the importance of **reorienting investments for the EU Invest sustainable activities** and invited the Commissioner to keep on with the commitment towards sustainability.

Mr Carlos Trias Pintó (Group III)

Watch his full intervention here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBYXBKsZ8vY>



Mr Simo Tainen (Group III)

Mr Tainen raised the issue of **the potential of bioeconomy**. *'In agriculture there are many possibilities to reduce greenhouse gases. We have to pay attention to how soil can improve this. In this matter farmers and forest-owners have a central role and they need an action support and encouragement in their work.*

Especially I would like to emphasize the significance and importance of science and research. The extra-resources presented by the Commission for the present and for the future research are very useful and necessary', he said.

Watch his full intervention here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfCqUlsETLg>



Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role



Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (ES)

Representative of the Spanish Council of Consumers and Users
Member of the Diversity Europe Group

NESI FORUM MÁLAGA 2019 CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION

Between the 24th and the 26th April, I attended the **New Economy and Social Innovation Forum (NESI)**, an event gathering more than 800 people coming from five different continents, focusing on new economic models. The EESC is planning to organize a post-NESI event, with the aim of presenting the results on the New Economic Models Research, by the EESC Single Market Observatory.

This second edition of the NESI Forum has been devoted to analyzing how we can get a 2030 in which the Sustainable Development Goals will be reached.

The focus was on six main tracks: **energy and resources, food, textiles, finance, urban and work**. In all the tracks of the NESI 2019 Forum, **the topic of conscious consumption has been discussed in depth.**



Our habits and **lifestyles** are decisive for changing the economy. The variety of the actions we can do has been demonstrated: to consume less, share, collaborate, repair, rethink what is important, produce at individual level, or empower local communities, are main areas to go towards an economy at the service of people and the planet.

Education is at the heart of the change. We need more education and awareness at all levels. We should let citizens understand that our consumption decisions have certain impacts, and there are alternatives with more positive results.

Information is crucial. Once we are aware of consuming in a sustainable way, we need information to make knowledgeable decisions and choose the best options.

Our **consumption culture** is connected to our general understanding of life. There is a lot of potential in thinking about what really matters and redefining the concept of "success".

The price is a relevant tool to modulate consumer preferences. It's important to explain the true cost of products. Negative externalities should be integrated into the price of products, to ensure that those who base their low prices on externalizing pollution, job insecurity or financial abuse, are regulated and have to pay for the reparation of their

negative impacts. But among all the debates, the newest and more motivating was the recommendation to **humanize the economy**. We must work on its principles and values, as well as the personal relationships that support it. To achieve this, it's essential to connect with our **local communities** and create a more human economy at local level in our neighborhoods, towns and communities.

By sectors, we have also drawn interesting conclusions about how conscious consumption will be key to move towards a more sustainable model. In the **fashion industry**, main changes will come from consumers, who will question impulsive and compulsive consumerism. The main message is "consume less and better".

Regarding **food**, we confirmed that information leads consumers to a better and more conscious consumption. We talked about the strong relationship between our lifestyles and our way of consuming. A slower way of living, connected to us and the environment allows a more conscious consumption.

The **future of work** is usually addressed from the internal logic of organizations, but not from the conscious citizen's approach. We can contribute to the development of fair and sustainable organizations through our support from consumption. Education is crucial.

In finances, we aspire to a system that generates shared social, environmental and economic value. To achieve this, financial education is essential, even for families and children. And in parallel, we must intensify education in values for managers, bankers and politicians.

In the sector of **energy and resources**, we urgently need to reduce our level of consumption so it's key to minimize what we consume. In the field of energy, we can use self-generation as a way to get our energy. It's necessary to explain the true cost of things and help people know how to reduce their ecological footprint so that they can improve their "environmental performance".





Ionuț SIBIAN (RO)
 Director, Civil Society Development Foundation
 Chair of the Federation of International Development and Humanitarian Aid NGOs (FOND)
 Team Europe Member
 Member of the Diversity Europe Group

The Bucharest International Civil Society Forum: Stakeholders across Europe send a strong message to the new EU decision-makers

In early June, representatives of more than 150 civil society organisations and platforms from 28 European countries gathered in Bucharest for the International Civil Society Forum. The event was organised in the context of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and in the framework of the Active Citizens Fund Romania. They all urged EU leaders to actively support civil society, in order to maintain its role in defending democracy, the rule of law and the fundamental rights of citizens.

The main concerns shared by the participants were that **democracy, human rights and the rule of law are increasingly threatened throughout Europe**. Moreover, civil society representatives are themselves targets of the same attackers, often populist and authoritarian politicians who make laws that no longer allow civil society to do its job. Leaders from the European institutions and major European networks of non-governmental organisations attending the event confirmed these dangers. Such concerns resulted in a draft open letter to the new EU decision-makers, to be published in the near future.

At the end of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Forum has developed a common message on behalf of civil society and addressed the future European Parliament. The message underlines that in the spirit of building a value-based Europe, civil society's space must be re-acquired, in order to be able to fulfil its role and objectives.



Ms Anna Rurka (President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe),
Mr Luca Jahier (EESC President), **Mr Klaus Iohannis** (President of Romania),
Mr Ionuț Sibian (EESC – Diversity Group member and Executive Director, Civil Society Development Foundation)



Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)
 President of the REX Section
 Member of the Diversity Europe Group

High-level meeting in Lusaka

On 11 and 12 June **Ms Slavova** represented the EESC and our group in Lusaka at the Parliamentary Assembly of the African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC).

She opened the event with the **Vice President of Zambia Ms Inonge Wina** and delivered a speech on the **EU-ACP longest-standing cooperation, current negotiations regarding a successor to the Cotonou Agreement** and the changing context related to **trade relations** between the EU and the more developed ACP countries and to the prominence of the African Union framework.

'A successor to Cotonou offers an opportunity to modernise the rules on issues including investment, services, fair trade, human rights, decent working conditions and migration. But cooperation needs to be placed on a new foundation based on the 2030 Agenda and the African states will have to decide whether they want to negotiate together as a continent. These facts motivate the EESC to insist in a coherent socio-economic strategy on EU-Africa relations and to show the proper place of civil society and the social partners' engagement in the Post-Cotonou negotiations', she stressed.

In the framework of this high-level event, she interacted with the **President of the ECOSOCC of the African Union Abozer Elmagi** and presented the REX opinion on *external aid, investment and trade as instruments*

to reduce economic migration, with a special focus on Africa (**REX/516** – Rapporteur: **Arno Metzler**, President of our group).

Mr Elmagi said that he would be glad to cooperate on the issue and to be involved with the follow-up of the opinion. He would also be eager to attend a REX Section, a Group III event or a plenary session.



In the margins of the ECOSOCC meeting: Interactions with President of the ECOSOCC of the African Union **Mr Abozer Elmagi**



In the margins of the ECOSOCC meeting: Interactions with Vice President of Zambia **Ms Inonge Wina**



Read the opinion:

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sl/node/67243>



Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role



Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL)
 President of the European Disability Forum
 President of the National Confederation
 of Disabled People – Greece
 Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group

12th Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in New York

Yannis Vardakastanis was the key speaker at the Civil Society Forum on June 10th. He also spoke in the plenary of COSP and at the side event “Disability Votes count” on 11th. Moreover, he attended the 12th Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.



“During the years of the negotiation, we did imagine that CRPD was the power to change society. It changes the life of persons with disabilities, and now we need to take stock of how States are implementing it”, I. Vardakastanis mentioned. The Group III Vice President attended COSP as a member of the EESC delegation and in his capacity as the President of EDF and NCDP Greece. On a day to remember, June 11, Ioannis Vardakastanis was awarded for his more than 30 years of contribution in the European and international disability movement from IDA.



Mr Vladimir Cuk (Executive Director IDA),
 Ms Ana Lucia Arellano (Chair IDA),
 Mr Ioannis Vardakastanis (EL)

Successful contribution of EDF to the European Development Days (EDD)

The European Disability Forum (EDF) had an active contribution during the European Development Days. EDF’s President, Yannis Vardakastanis was a speaker at three different panels and had the opportunity to share EDF’s work in international cooperation, the perspective of persons with disabilities and DPOs. Moreover, he had a very productive bilateral meeting with Henriette Geiger, Director of People and Peace at DG DEVCO to ensure a strong collaboration between DPOs and DG DEVCO. EDF suggested the organisation of a Global Disability Summit, similar to the one in London and Argentina, as well as strengthening the capacity building of regional DPOs. The first session focused on importance of active and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in democracy and decision making processes concerning development and international cooperation. Mr Vardakastanis shared the work of EDF by presenting our new [international cooperation strategy](#) and expressed that “persons with disabilities must be engaged in international cooperation not just as beneficiaries but also as experts”.

The second session was a report launch titled “[Falling through the cracks: Exposing inequalities in the European Union and beyond](#)”, organised by ‘Make Europe Sustainable for All (MESA)’ and SDG Watch Europe. Mr Vardakastanis highlighted during the session that “persons with disabilities are facing widespread and daily discrimination and exclusion - we will not wait another decade to act and call for action”.

The third session titled “[Making inclusion in humanitarian settings a reality](#)” was organised by DG ECHO, Humanity and Inclusion, Finland (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and EDF. It included the presentation of [DG ECHO’s guidance note on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in EU-funded humanitarian aid operations](#) by Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management European in DG ECHO. EDF welcomes the initiative to raise awareness and discuss good practices to ensure better, safer, more accessible and inclusive humanitarian aid.



Read the international cooperation strategy:

www.edf-feph.org/sites/default/files/edf_in_the_world_-_international_cooperation_strategy_final_3.docx

Read “Falling through the cracks: Exposing inequalities in the European Union and beyond”:

<https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/FALLING-THROUGH-THE-CRACKS-JUNE-2019.pdf>

Read “Making inclusion in humanitarian settings a reality”:

<https://eudevdays.eu/community/sessions/3021/making-inclusion-in-humanitarian-settings-a-reality>

Read the DG ECHO’s guidance note on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in EU-funded humanitarian aid operations:

https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/2019-01_disability_inclusion_guidance_note.pdf





Pavel TRANTINA (CS)
 EU relations and project manager, Czech Council of Children and Youth (ČRDM)
 Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group



Vladimira Drvalova (EESC – Employer’s Group),
Lucie Studničná (EESC – Worker’s Group),
Pavel TRANTINA (EESC – Diversity Europe Group),
Josef Středula (President of ČMKOS), **Petr Parma** (ASO)

The National Day of European Semester

Group III Vice-President **Pavel Trantina** co-organised the National Day of European Semester in Prague. The aim of the event, organized by the EESC in 10 countries this year, is **to map how are Civil Society Organisations involved in consultations regarding the whole process, involved in drafting of annual National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and monitoring of their implementation etc.** The event in Prague has shown that although in some areas the **Czech Republic can serve as a good example of involving of social partners in the design of NRPs, civil dialogue needs to be improved significantly, as well as implementation of the programmes.** The input from all 10 national days will serve as a basis for an EESC opinion and should bring **innovative ideas for all member states for the years to come.**



Contribution by Mr Trantina



Christian MOOS (DE)
 German Civil Servants’ Association
 Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Civil Society Days – Workshop “Resilient democracies: the positive impact of civic action and organized civil society”

Christian Moos presented the alarming situation of the shrinking space for civil society in the European Union, giving examples from South Eastern European states. As a solution, he described the importance of the **EESC opinion on “Resilient democracy through a strong and diverse civil society”**, highlighting different possible fields of action, such as the **call for a European control mechanism on the rule of law and fundamental rights, the creation of a cluster, proposed by the new MFF, entitled “Investing in people, social cohesion and values”**. Finally, he emphasized the need of **sufficient flexibility** in order for the Commission to be able to offer financial support to CSOs in the case of reduction or stopping of funding by national governments because of political reasons.



Read the opinion:
<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/resilient-democracy-through-strong-and-diverse-civil-society-own-initiative-opinion>



Kinga JOÓ (HU)
 Vice-president of the National Association of Large Families (NOE)
 Member of the board of the National Cooperation Fund (NEA)
 Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Work-life Balance: Health and well-being in the digital era

On 28th of June, Ms Joó took part in a debate organized by Euractiv. She said that she supports the **progress made by the work-life balance directive**: ‘It allows workers to achieve full potential’. **Women with care responsibilities are more likely to work part-time, to work in the informal economy and less likely to contribute to social security**, she added. Other speakers who were involved were **Katarina Ivankovic-Knežević** (Director, Social Affairs, DG EMPL, European Commission), **Monika Pozderac** (Counsellor, Employment and Social policy, Permanent Representation of Croatia to the EU), **Claire Dhéret** (Head of Social Europe & Well-being programme, European Policy Centre) and **Gary Shaughnessy** (Chair, Z Zurich Foundation).



Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role



Arno METZLER (DE)
President of the Diversity Europe Group

General Assembly of UNAF in Reims

On 22nd and 23rd of June **UNAF (National Union of Family Associations of France)** held its General Assembly in the city of Reims.

At the initiative of Vice-president of UNAF and Group III Member **Ms Basset**, President Arno Metzler took part in this event. The main theme was given as **Participatory democracy and the role of intermediary bodies**. More than 600 participants attended the debates.

Mr Metzler gave a statement on behalf of Group III on **how Europe does take organized civil society into account**. In his speech related to **family policy**, he invited for Group III's conference on **New Role Models for Societies in Europe on 12 November 2019** and added: *"I am wondering why we do not have a family policy approach on EU level. There is need to close the gap. Families are important elements of European cultural heritage. They are the major glue to keep civil society as such and organized civil society in special, together. I propose Group III is taking initiative on the European level to bring together all those who are involved in making it possible that families continue to exist in Europe in next Spring"*.

The auditorium spontaneously applauded the idea of a **European Family Parliament** organized by Group III, following the example of the Rural Parliament which was invented by former President (Group III) **Staffan Nilsson** and which is still going strong. The president of **UNAF promised support and the elaboration of the European Family Parliament and to encourage other European networks for families to do the same**.



Ronny LANNOO (BE)
UNIZO organisation of SMEs & independent professionals
Member of the Diversity Europe Group

The new European rules on retail: between the free market and sustainability

On the 27th of June, our Member and Rapporteur on the **opinion on the future of Retail in Europe**, **Ronny Lannoo** and the co-rapporteur Gerardo Larghi (Group II) met stakeholders in charge of the file in Warsaw. **This was in the framework of the hearings organized by the European Economic and Social Committee in Italy, in Finland and in Belgium. The hearing in Poland was chaired by Ms Elżbieta Szadzińska, representing consumers in our Group.** The EESC opinion is a reaction to the communication on this subject by the European Commission. The Polish stakeholders, representatives of retail, workers and consumers, supported the priorities set out in the opinion. **The major technological developments place the sector in front of great challenges.** The sectors in Poland are aware of this, but call for a correct competition which is based on more than the race for the lowest price. Furthermore, they support the promotion of the diversity of stores, wishing for more help provided to SMEs with regard to investments, especially in terms of digitalization and e-commerce as well as of an adapted social dialogue. All these measures are based on taking the wishes and sustainable hopes of consumers into account. A final report of the hearings will be published in October.



Ms Elżbieta Szadzińska and Mr Ronny Lannoo (Group III members) at the hearing in Warsaw in Poland concerning the opinion on the future of Retail

Read the opinion:

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/retail-sector-communication>

6th Meeting EU-Africa Economic and Social stakeholders' network

The 6th meeting of the EU-Africa Economic and Social stakeholders' network took place on the 3rd and 4th of July. It was organized in several sessions, **with the focus on EU-Africa investment mechanisms, investment and trade as instruments, impact in the private sector and impact investing in the social and environmental sectors**. The meeting started with a welcoming from EESC President **Luca Jahier**, followed by some introductory remarks by **Jaroslaw Mulewicz, president of the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee**. The opening session had **Robert Lisinge**, Chief of the Section Energy, Infrastructure and Services, Private Sector Development

and Finance Division (PSDFD) as a speaker, setting the scene of the investment climate in Africa. He explained the surge in African investment, mentioning the Agenda 2063, based on sustainability, regional integration, peace and security. Following him, **Corinne Salinas**, International aid – cooperation officer (EU Trust Fund for Sahel and Lake Chad, DG DEVCO) presented the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), showing how through vocational training and strengthening micro, small and medium size enterprises it was possible to improve employability in Africa. The final speaker of the opening session, **Torsten Ewerbeck**, Deputy Head of Unit Coordination of the EIP Secretariat and Blending Facilities (DG DEVCO), presented practicalities of the External Investment Plan



Read more information: <https://europ>



Renate HEINISCH (DE)
 Pharmacist, Board member of BAGSO (Germany's Federal Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations)
 Former MEP (1994-1999)
 Chairwoman of Baden-Württemberg Parents' Association
 Member of the Diversity Europe Group

School for Democracy – Democracy for school!

Democracy education is to be achieved as a school mission in terms of educational policy in Europe. School has the task to empower young people to self-responsible and democratic action in society. This includes the **communication of knowledge about political, historical, societal and economic structures and developments**. Ms **Heinisch** took part at a Congress in Stuttgart dedicated to democracy education. She met with the **Culture Minister for the state of Baden-Württemberg Ms Eisenmann** and informed about the opinion of Mr Moos on **“Resilient democracy through a strong and diverse civil society”**. We understand that “democrats don't fall from the sky” (T.Eschenburg) and we need a “government of the people, by the people, for the people” (A. Lincoln). In Baden Württemberg a guide to democracy education is currently being developed, aiming at the schools.



Culture Minister for the state of Baden-Württemberg **Ms Eisenmann** and **Ms Heinisch** (Group III Member)

Read the opinion:

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/resilient-democracy-through-strong-and-diverse-civil-society-own-initiative-opinion>



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package (EIP). Our member and REX Section President **Ms Dilyana Slavova** introduced the panel entitled **‘Investment and trade as instruments, with special focus on Africa’** with our president **Mr Metzler** and **Mr Wagnsonner** presenting their work in progress on this topic. **Mr Metzler** put emphasis on the need for transparency and on the added value of CSOs, of partnerships and of exchanging experiences to encourage investments in various projects. He also tackled the issues of trust in the legal sector as well as of education and training for young people in order to fight unemployment. **‘It's not only about money! This is the civil society which is looking for added value in order to collaborate more than we did before’**, he concluded.



Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)
 President of the REX Section
 Member of the Diversity Europe Group

International Seminar – Social and Solidarity Economy in Tunisia

On 3rd of July, **Ms Dilyana Slavova** took part in the international seminar **‘Social and Solidarity Economy in Tunisia’** organized by the association *‘Entreprendre au Maghreb’* at the initiative of the Tunisian Mission to the EU and hosted by the EESC.

In her speech, she referred to the **relaunch of the negotiations with regard to the Cotonou Partnership Agreement** which will expire on 29 February 2020 and underlined the important support civil society received from the Tunisian government in the context of trade negotiations.

‘Tunisia and Europe are exactly on the same line when it comes to the role of civil society during such trade negotiations and during the process of implementation. We also share many other common interests, such as micro/small enterprises, issues of women, fair trade and the reciprocal promotion of agricultural products’, she stated.



Mr Krzysztof Balon (VP of Group III), **Ms Dilyana Slavova** (Group III Member, President of the REX Section), **Mr Saad Seddik** (Tunisian Minister of Agriculture, Hydraulic Resources and Fisheries)

She announced an **international conference to take place in cooperation with the city of Tunis on 22-23 August** and mentioned the **Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions to be held in Cairo on 22-23 October**, with a special focus on **Digitalization and SMEs in the Mediterranean**.

Our Vice-president and co-spokesperson for the Social Economy category **Krzysztof Balon** also took the floor in order to present the activities of the EESC in the context of social economy.



Mr Arno Metzler (President – Group III), **Mr Saad Seddik** (Tunisian Minister of Agriculture, Hydraulic Resources and Fisheries) **Ms Dilyana Slavova** (Group III Member, President of the REX Section), **Mr Mohamed Ridha Ben Mosbah** (Ambassador, Mission of the Republic of Tunisia), **Mr Krzysztof Balon** (VP of Group III)



Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

At its Plenary session on 19-20 June 2019 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinion for which a Group III member was Rapporteurs.



Karolina DRESZER-SMALEC (PL)

*President of the National Federation of Polish NGOs (OFOP)
Vice-president for National Platforms, European Civic Forum (ECF)
Member of the Diversity Europe Group*

SOC/627 – Further strengthening the Rule of Law within the Union. State of play and possible next steps (Communication)

The EESC:

- recalls the essential watchdog role played by the civil society, which should be further supported
- reiterates its support for an EU mechanism to monitor rule of law and fundamental rights and proposes to establish an EU stakeholders Forum to debate solutions
- calls on the Commission to adopt a Strategy on communication, education and citizen awareness concerning these key issues
- regrets that the short reflection period has not allowed for deeper consultation



Krzysztof BALON (PL)

*Secretary of the Programming Committee of the Working Community of Associations of Social Organisations (WRZOS)
Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group*

TEN/692 – For a better implementation of the Social Pillar, promoting essential services

The EESC:

- asks for the concept of universal access to SGEIs to be clarified, and for legislative measures to be introduced obliging Member States to establish universal access indicators for each SGEI
- calls for the universal service to be adapted to guarantee the provision of state-of-the-art services and offer full geographical coverage for all network industries in general and for electronic communications more specifically
- calls for an evaluation of services of general interest at national, regional or local level in the Member States; for this evaluation to be independent, pluralist and balanced; for it to cover economic, social and environmental aspects; and for it to be based on a set of criteria and conducted in consultation with all stakeholders, using a new harmonized evaluation methodology at EU level based on common indicators
- calls for the essential services under principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights to be made an integral part of the European semester's Social Scoreboard



Alain COHEUR (BE)

*Director of European and International Affairs of the National Union of Socialist Mutual Health Funds
Member of the Diversity Europe Group*

INT/871 – Towards an appropriate European legal framework for social economy enterprises

The EESC:

- recognizes that social economy enterprises (SEEs) slip through the cracks of the EU law by being neither capitalist-type for-profit firms nor not-for profit (financially altruistic) entities
- proposes introducing into EU law a legal framework suited to better recognition of SEEs
- urges the Commission to launch a study on the concept of limited profitability and on business models that operate in this way, in order to identify more precisely what is required, in terms of legal, financial and tax frameworks, for cultivating the competitive strengths of these enterprises and ultimately, where appropriate, to prescribe good practice
- asks the Commission to draft an interpretative communication on Article 54 of the TFEU and on the Treaty articles relating to competition law, in order to clarify the concept of “not-for-profit” in EU law



Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL)

*Economist, MBA, member of the board of directors of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (GSEVEE) for SMEs
Member of the board of directors of the Panhellenic Confederation of Restaurants and Related Businesses (POESE)
Representative of the GSEVEE at UEAPME for SMEs
President of the Brussels-based Avignon Academy for SMEs;
president of the EU-Turkey JCC
Member of the Diversity Europe Group*

NAT/774 – Union Civil Protection Mechanism (amendment)

The EESC:

- may contribute in specific advisory groups to the periodical revision of the guidelines on risk mapping and through appropriate inter-institutional initiatives in order to ensure uniform conditions for the implementation of the UCPM and with a view to the establishment and organization of the Civil Protection Knowledge Network
- asks the Council, the Parliament and the Commission to explore the feasibility and plan the implementation of a European Training Centre and Knowledge Hub connected with existing national and sub-national structures, including centres of excellence, specialised networks, researchers and other experts
- deems it necessary to integrate appropriately the new UCPM objectives and approach into the framework of existing structural and investment policies

EESC President's European Peace journey begins in Northern Ireland



Jane MORRICE (UK)

*Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Member of the Diversity Europe Group*

There will never be an easy way to deal with the sensitivities surrounding everyday life and politics in Northern Ireland. On his visit to Belfast and Bangor in June, EESC President, Luca Jahier, pulled it off with aplomb! At a time when the controversy over Brexit and the border dominate the headlines, his two-day trip was littered with potential pitfalls which he managed to side step listening and learning as he went and leaving nuggets of 'European' wisdom behind.

From early morning to late night, Luca Jahier met local politicians, church leaders, community workers, women's groups, arts organisations and vulnerable young people supported by EU funding. Keen to underline the EU's role in the Northern Ireland Peace Process, his focus was the impact of the European PEACE Programme on the lives of people coming out of conflict. In two separate sessions in Belfast, the EESC President met young people and women still living in the shadow of the 'troubles' on their streets. He was moved by their testimony, impressed by their tenacity and encouraged to keep pressing for continued EU engagement with Northern Ireland whatever happens with Brexit.

The EESC delegation included Stefano Mallia from Malta, Chair of the EESC Brexit Committee, Judy McKnight, the UK delegate on the Brexit Committee and Katherine Heid from the President's cabinet as well as Michael Smyth and Jane Morrice, the two UK representatives from Northern Ireland. Those visiting for the

first time were surprised and shocked by what they saw and heard about the fragility of the peace process and the risks posed by Brexit. As with most visitors to NI, they were particularly concerned seeing the 'peace walls' which still divide Catholic and Protestant communities in Belfast.

The second day started with a gruelling cross-examination on BBC morning radio about the 'European' angle on Brexit. There is a growing impression, fuelled by the tabloid press, that Brussels is being overly harsh on the UK in the negotiations. The President reminded listeners that the EU had been good to Northern Ireland and the proposal for a European Peace and Reconciliation Centre in Northern Ireland, based on an EESC Opinion (2008), was given extensive television news coverage.

The final hours of the President's visit were spent in the glorious surroundings of Bangor Abbey overlooking the Irish Sea which had been the launch pad of the sixth century pilgrim Columbanus on his first ever journey to what he called 'Europe'. Often known as the 'White Dove', Columbanus created seats of learning throughout continental Europe and is described by Robert Schumann as the Patron Saint of European Unity.

Luca Jahier's visit to Northern Ireland was the starting point for his own journey focussing on Borders and Peace in Europe, taking him to Sopron in Hungary, where east German citizens crossed the border into the West in 1989, to Berlin for the 30th anniversary of the Fall of the Wall and ending in Nicosia, Cyprus, another divided island of Europe.

Jane Morrice



NEWS from Group III

Communication Commission Members and contact points in Vilnius

On 27-28 June, EESC Communication Commission Members and contact points gathered at the Grand Dukes Palace in Vilnius. Different topics were on the agenda, mainly related to **communication and the European elections**.

On the first day the role played by the EESC in the European elections has been analyzed. The Head of European Parliament Liaison Office in Lithuania – **Ms Daiva Jakaite** – and Lithuanian Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs **Mr Darius Skusevičius** intervened on two main topics: **the Lithuanian context behind the EU elections and disinformation**. Those interventions were followed by presentations of best practices examples of going local events linked to the European elections by EESC Members. Our Members **Mr Trias Pintó** and **Mr Longo** shared their experiences from Spain and from Italy. The afternoon was dedicated to a **discussion on European elections, disinformation and fake news** with Head of European Commission Representation in Lithuania **Mr Arnoldas Pranckevičius** and with a representative of the online resistance movement 'Baltic Elves' **Mr Giedrius Sakalauskas**.

The second day was mainly dedicated to an exchange of views on how to update the current regulatory framework to increase the impact of EESC communication and to better meet members' needs and expectations. Before the closing remarks by EESC Vice-President in charge of Communication **Ms Isabel Caño Aguilar**, two Lithuanian journalists **Mr Vilius Petkauskas** (15 min.lt) and **Mr Vaidotas Beniušis** (Editor In Chief at *BNS Lithuania*, contributor to AFP) exchanged on fact checking and recommendations related to disinformation.



OUR GROUP'S STRENGTH

SOCIAL ECONOMY CATEGORY MEETING

On 21 June the second meeting of the Social Economy Category in 2019 took place, with the participation of **four external guest speakers and discussions concentrating on two key topics**. Firstly, the Members exchanged **views on the outcomes of the elections to the European Parliament and the implications for the social economy**, with a **representative of Athenora Consulting**. This item is of particular importance as contacts with MEPs likely to support the sector should be made as soon as possible, with a view to encouraging the re-establishment of the European Parliament's Social Economy Inter-group. The second topic which was discussed, related to **how to better finance the social economy through the ESF+, peer to peer and the private sector**. Speakers on this panel included **Dr Gerard Salole**, Chief Executive Officer of the European Foundation Centre and **Mr Lozano**, International Relations Coordinator for the Spanish Social Economy Employer's Confederation, both of whom spoke alongside **a representative of the European Commission**.



NEXT FARMERS' CATEGORY MEETING ON 10 JULY

On the 10th of July, the Farmer's Category Meeting will hold its 2nd meeting. **Dr Patrick Wall**, Professor of Public Health at University College Dublin and former Chairperson of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) will deliver a presentation on sustainable diets and the importance of societal attitudes towards the agricultural sector in relation to climate change.

Furthermore, **Beffni Carpenter**, Agriculture Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union will give an update on the relations with Mercosur.



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Print
QE-AG-19-006-EN-C
ISSN 2467-4451
Web
QE-AG-19-006-EN-N
ISSN 2467-446X

e-mail: gr3@eesc.europa.eu • www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3
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EESC-2019-59-EN