



**THE EESC IN THE WORLD**  
**External Relations newsletter**  
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Dear reader,

First of all, let me welcome you to this second issue of the REX newsletter.

When we published the first issue last December, we were still hoping that the new year would bring the end of the pandemic and a long hoped for recovery. Instead, we are now facing war in Europe, in one of the countries of our Eastern Neighbourhood. The attack on Ukraine ordered by the President of the Russian Federation, with the complicity of the Belarusian regime, is a direct attack on the security and stability of Europe, as well as our values of democracy and the rule of law. It is causing a high death toll and war crimes, such as the bombing of a children's hospital in Mariupol, a humanitarian catastrophe with millions of people forced to flee the country, devastating environmental damage, and a serious disruption of the world's food supply chain, which could hit African countries in particular, which are heavily reliant on Ukrainian wheat. All this against the backdrop of a possible nuclear war, with which the Kremlin has openly threatened the European Union and the United States.

The response of the Ukrainian people has surprised the world: they are fighting for each square meter of their country, in a reaction to the attack that even their aggressor could not have foreseen. It is now our duty to assist Ukraine by all possible means, and we welcome the decisions taken by the Council to impose unprecedentedly harsh sanctions on Russia and to use the European Peace Facility in order to help the Ukrainian resistance. Shortly after that, the Commission proposed a joint European action plan to finally make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels: by implementing the different measures proposed under REPowerEU, we could reduce EU demand for Russian gas by two thirds before the end of the year.

This would be a fundamental move towards establishing Europe's strategic autonomy, implementing the Green Deal, and ensuring the necessary coherence in our approach to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Every day, the EU pays hundreds of millions of dollars to Russia for energy, and we don't want to finance the war with our energy dependency on Moscow. The only solution is to get rid of this dependency by taking resolute and courageous steps.

Much more action is needed from the institutions of the European Union and from our governments: war, sanctions and Russia's deliberate market manipulation have already led to an unprecedented increase in our energy bill, and the cost will have an impact on our citizens and businesses. We have to counter these developments, which have the potential to seriously threaten our future, and we can do this through joint action and cohesion among us: **a more united Europe is a stronger Europe**, and the European Economic and Social Committee should never stop reminding European decision-makers **of the need for more solidarity and more resilience in our Union**.

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immediately a debate was held in which all members expressed their solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Later on, our president, Christa Schweng sent a letter to all Economic and Social Councils of the Member States, calling for common action and coordination. Many more of the initiatives we have taken are reported in this issue of our newsletter.

Both in the EESC and in the REX section, we will strive to continue to support Ukrainian civil society through our well-established channels, such as the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform and our bilateral contacts. We will also reflect on new avenues for dialogue with Russian civil society, which is under constant pressure from the authorities and is no longer able to express itself through its official bodies. We have all seen the unbelievable scenes of elderly women and children jailed just because they were supporting peaceful coexistence with a neighbouring country.

I hope that the months to come will bring a reasonable resolution of this terrible war, and that they will lead the EU towards better coordination in order to tackle the challenges of the future.

Dimitris Dimitriadis  
REX Section President



### **The security of Europe and the war in Ukraine**

Faced with the tragic situation in Ukraine, the EESC has been taking initiatives as events have unfolded.

On 8 February, when the Russian Federation was amassing its troops along the Ukrainian border, the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform adopted a [statement on the situation in Ukraine](#) calling on institutions and civil society organisations to act in order to de-escalate the situation, stop the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, support Ukrainian self-determination and territorial integrity, take active steps against disinformation and threats to cybersecurity, impose sanctions against the leadership of the aggressor country and its allies, and support the Ukrainian economy.

On 22 February, when Vladimir Putin recognised two secessionist republics in the Donbass, EESC president Christa Schweng and REX section president Dimitris Dimitriadis issued a [statement on the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk by the Russian Federation](#), strongly condemning this violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity.

On 24 February, news of the attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation reached the EESC plenary session. The EESC members held a spontaneous debate in which they strongly condemned the invasion, expressed their solidarity with the Ukrainian people, and called for strong action at both EU and national level in a spirit of unity. They also stressed that values such as democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law were non-negotiable, and called on the EU and its Member States to provide further political, financial, technical, and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. The plenary concluded that [Europe would not be safe without a safe and secure Ukraine](#).

On 9 March EESC president Christa Schweng issued a [statement](#), calling on the Heads of

State and Government to remain united and turn solidarity with Ukraine into further action. The statement underlines the humanitarian aspect of the crisis, as well as the need to reduce the EU's dependency on energy and raw materials imported from Russia. Finally, it notes that the EU must take the opportunity provided by this terrible situation to make real progress on its common foreign and security policy.

Also on 9 March, the [REX section meeting](#) discussed the situation with Alexander Shubin, Olena Pavlenko and Vasyl Andreyev, all members of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform, and with Yuliya Tychkivska, from the Aspen Institute Kyiv. These representatives of Ukrainian civil society expressed their gratitude for what the European Union and its Member States were doing and asked for a quick EU accession for Ukraine. The EESC members agreed that European civil society would continue its support and that [Ukraine](#) belonged in Europe and deserved to decide on its own future.

On 24 March, the EESC plenary session discussed the situation with the Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, with members of Ukrainian civil society, and with Mikhail Khodorkovsky, founder of the Open Russia Foundation and opponent of Putin and the war in Ukraine. The plenary also adopted the resolution [War in Ukraine and its economic, social and environmental impact](#), in which it stressed the need for diplomatic action with an active role for the EU institutions, if necessary underpinned by more sanctions. Furthermore, the Committee suggested ways to improve the humanitarian situation and integrate Ukraine into the EU single market, and expressed its support for civil society in Ukraine and in Russia, the latter coming under increasing pressure from the Kremlin. While reaffirming the importance of Europe's strategic autonomy, the EESC noted the need to prepare for the new situation economically, as well as in terms of energy and technology, supporting European citizens and businesses in facing the consequences of the war and sanctions. Finally, it stressed that the impact of the war should not come to the detriment of climate action and sustainability: special consideration should be given to the need to continue implementing the European Green Deal.

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## Events

## International trade high on the agenda

While the European Commission is reviewing its approach to trade and sustainable development and domestic advisory groups (DAGs), the EESC has been very active in conveying the views of civil society on how to achieve a truly sustainable trade policy.

On 25 January, EESC chair of the Follow-up Committee on International Trade and EESC DAG coordinator Tanja Buzek joined a meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade (INTA) to discuss the role of DAGs and the review of the 15-point action plan on trade and sustainable development. She was accompanied by a selection of EU DAG chairs, who for the first time were able to interact with members of the INTA Committee on these topics. The following day, Ms Buzek took the floor at the *Global trade, fair enough?* event hosted by the EP's Fair Trade Working Group.

On 28 January, the own-initiative opinion [REX/535](#) on *Next Generation Trade and Sustainable Development – Reviewing the 15-point action plan* (see the previous issue of our newsletter) was presented by its rapporteur at the International Conference on More Sustainable and Responsible Trade, organised by the French presidency ([read more](#)).

On 21 February, the REX section held a webinar on *Supply chains and the case of reshoring* to confront ideas ahead of a major conference on EU industrial policy taking place on 4 March 2022. The event focused on the motivations for strengthening supply chain resilience, the content and the gaps of the EU toolbox, including reshoring, the challenges faced, as well as future prospects ([read more](#)).

On 29 March, the EESC hosted the [1<sup>st</sup> European civil society forum on trade and sustainable development](#). The event's main aim was to break down silos, enabling debates between institutions, academia and civil society on trade and sustainable development: from substantive rights through monitoring to enforcement and much more. The underlying ambition was to feed ideas and recommendations into the reflections on the future of EU trade and sustainable development policy, in the double context of the review of the 15-point action plan and recent trade and sustainability developments outside the EU.



### **Strengthening transatlantic ties in defence of our democracies**

The EESC's Transatlantic Relations Follow-up Committee met on 16 March 2022 to discuss two timely topics, with the aim of strengthening the EU-US partnership on the global scene: the state of play of transatlantic trade policy and the Year of Action between the two Summits for Democracy.

Many prominent guests and experts took part in the meeting, underlining the need to further strengthen the EU-US partnership as well as the resilience of our democracies, as an inseparable part of a rules-based international order and values-based multilateralism.

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### **EU and UK: meeting of the EESC's Follow-up Committee**

The 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EU-UK Follow-up Committee took place on 15 March, with the participation of João Vale De Almeida, ambassador of the European Union to the United Kingdom, and Nathalie Loiseau, MEP and chair of the delegation to the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly. Mr Almeida and Ms Loiseau commended the EU-UK Follow-up Committee's efforts towards maintaining and strengthening relations with UK civil society, and offered their support and strengthened cooperation.



### **EU and Canada: a joint statement from the DAGs**

Following the CETA Civil Society Forum and DAG-to-DAG meeting hosted by Canada in February, the [Joint Statement](#) adopted by the Canadian and EU DAGs was published in early March. The Joint Statement stresses the fruitful collaboration between the Canadian and EU domestic advisory groups, while calling for further improvements in the implementation of CETA for the benefit of all.



**The Western Balkans: Albania on its path to the EU**  
The EESC's [Western Balkans Follow-up Committee](#) held its 52<sup>nd</sup> meeting on 28 February. The main point of discussion was **Albania's** challenges and priorities in its European integration process. The meeting, chaired by Ionuț Sibian, hosted prominent speakers including H.E. Suela Janina, ambassador and head of mission of the Republic of Albania to the EU, officials from the European Commission and the ILO, as well as civil society representatives from Albania. Next meeting: 24 May in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.



**EU-Serbia Joint Consultative Committee: strong messages ahead of Serbian elections**

The [13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EU-Serbia Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee](#) took place on 25 March 2022 in Brussels. Prominent guests joined the members of the EU and Serbian sides of the JCC to discuss the current state of play in EU-Serbia relations and the accession process, the effects of the Joint Declaration from the 12<sup>th</sup> Serbia-EU Joint Consultative Committee meeting in view of the upcoming Serbian elections, the country's outlooks on the EU Global Gateway strategy and an overview of the rule of law situation in Serbia. A [joint declaration](#) has been adopted.



### Strategic foresight: a vision for the future of Europe

The REX section meeting of 1 February was dedicated to strategic foresight, with a conference on [the EU as a new global actor and the role of civil society](#). As the discipline involving anticipating events, thus shaping the future in a proactive way, strategic foresight is increasingly used in policy-making in the EU institutions. The conference was opened by EESC president Christa Schweng: Ms Schweng particularly stressed that the EU needs to protect its strategic goals such as the green and digital transitions from possible disruptions caused by external events. In the light of the war in Ukraine, which started three weeks later, this remark highlights the importance of integrating strategic foresight into our activities. In their statements, the section presidents explained how their respective bodies were doing just that. The French presidency of the Council, representatives from European institutions and think tanks experts illustrated their approach to strategic foresight, and interesting insight was gained on what is going on in the Western Balkans, Africa, and China. The last panel focused specifically on how civil society can contribute to strategic foresight, and all participants, panellists and members stressed that civil society interests and concerns should be reflected in the strategic foresight reports drafted by the Commission. Finally, the ongoing opinion on the second Commission report was presented by its rapporteur, Sandra Parthie ([INT/958](#)).

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### **The EU-China Civil Society Round Table on economic recovery after the pandemic**

On 14 December, the EU-China Civil Society Round Table met again after a two-year pause. The round table, held in hybrid format, enabled participants to discuss the post-COVID economic recovery and possible EU-China cooperation, without omitting difficult questions.

The joint statement, signed by the co-chairs Christa Schweng (EESC president) and Zhang Qingli (chair of the China Economic and Social Council), calls for better international cooperation among civil society organisations and inclusion thereof, whether based on a trade agreement, an investment agreement or any other kind of partnership. The joint statement also emphasises that economic recovery and trade relations are inseparable from compliance with fundamental values, rights and market freedoms. Both sides, while respecting each other's differences, commit to jointly promoting basic values, including rights, freedom and the dignity of human beings.

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## **Upcoming events**



### **Mission to Chile and Argentina in April**

A delegation of EESC members will undertake an exploratory mission to Chile on 11 April. During meetings with Chilean civil society representatives, they will discuss the ongoing constitutional process and its socio-economic impact, as well as the modernised EU-Chile Association Agreement. The mission will then join the inter-parliamentary assembly EuroLat, which will take place in Buenos Aires (11-14 April), alongside a dedicated civil society event.



### **Exhibition on Belarusian political prisoners**

A virtual exhibition on political prisoners in Belarus will be launched on 12 April, the same day that the REX section will adopt its information report [REX/545](#) on *Supporting independent media sector in Belarus*.

## Opinions in the spotlight

### **REX/536 A new framework for free trade agreements, economic partnership and investment agreements that guarantees the real involvement of CSOs and the social partners and ensures public awareness**

The EESC is putting forward a proposal for a new framework for the negotiation and implementation of trade, economic partnership and investment agreements. The proposal should enable proper involvement of civil society during the whole life-cycle of an agreement. It aims to preserve the transparency of the agreement's negotiating process, while ensuring its confidentiality. According to the proposal, a memorandum of understanding between the European Commission and partner countries would be signed at the beginning of the negotiations, committing them to ensuring the transparency of the process, and engaging with the social partners as observers with certain rights and obligations. The observers would be appointed in a balanced way, ensuring the representativeness of various interest groups.

### **REX/542 Consolidating the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in order to improve the EU's capacity to react in the face of extreme events, including those occurring outside its territory**

The EESC recommends strengthening the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), as it is no longer sufficiently capable or broad enough to respond to disasters linked to climate change and multiple risks, particularly in terms of prevention, preparedness, warning, planning and operational capabilities. The opinion stresses the need for the link between civil protection (short-term operations) and humanitarian aid (long-term management) to be better addressed and coordinated, the post-disaster action of the EU for events outside its territory to be better implemented, and the diplomatic dimension of European civil protection to be further developed. The EESC stresses the utmost importance of evolving operational cooperation through harmonisation of training, compatibility of material and equipment, clarity, and efficiency of command chains.

## Ongoing opinions and information reports

[REX/547](#) The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the study group for the opinion on *The Global Gateway* took place on 16 March. The meeting was preceded by a hearing with speakers from various EU institutions, international development banks and think-tanks. The opinion is important due to its cross-cutting nature, as it will contribute to the Global Gateway strategy, which is a template for how Europe can build more resilient connections with the world.



[REX/543](#) Analysis the role of organised civil society in the new EU-Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific (OEACP) agreement, including the situation of the EPAs in this framework

[REX/544](#) The new EU-US Trade and Technology Council in action: priorities for business, workers and consumers and needed safeguards

[REX/548](#) Cultural diplomacy as a vector of EU external relations. New partnerships and role of CSOs

[REX/550](#) Geopolitical impact of energy transition

[REX/551](#) Multilateral investor-state arbitration court: assessment of the UNCITRAL process and its achievements in light of civil society recommendations

[REX/553](#) Youth Policy in the Western Balkans, as part of the Innovation Agenda for the Western Balkans

[REX/554](#) Instrumentalisation of migrants

[REX/537](#) COVID-19: The role of civil society in the reconstruction and resilience of the Euro-Mediterranean region (information report)

[REX/545](#) Supporting the independent media sector in Belarus (information report)

[REX/549](#) Digital transition in the Euro-Mediterranean region (information report)

[REX/552](#) Socio-economic situation in Latin America following the Covid-19 crisis – the role of civil society in the recovery process (information report)

[REX/555](#) Energy policies and strategies in the Euro-Mediterranean region (information report)

## From our members

### Why Putin is destined to lose in Ukraine

Message of hope to fellow EESC members

First of all, Putin's troops are already experiencing a huge **drop in soldiers' morale**, while the morale of the Ukrainian forces is on the rise. The outcome of the war may come as a surprise to many, because it is not just a matter of material superiority, but much more of spiritual dynamics. And these changes in morale dynamics are favouring the Ukrainian army and volunteer fighters. So let's keep our own spirits high and do everything we can to keep that morale of Ukrainian people and forces rising. **Time is not on Putin's side!**

Second factor: **language similarity!** The Russian troops perfectly understand what the civilian population in Ukraine is saying. This creates the impression of a civil war for those aggressors, as if they were fighting against their own people.

Finally, the **refugees** of this war will not be keen to stay in their host countries forever. It is just a matter of time before they return to their cities and villages after the war in their own regions ends. This is a very different type of migration from what we have seen since 2015, and only a set of temporary measures is needed at this point. Even if the war should last, these people love their country so much that most of them will inevitably return back to their homeland. Especially if we clearly make the point that one day Ukraine will become a member of the EU.

We all should take these aspects, especially the morale dynamics, seriously in our future analysis. And we should act accordingly when thinking about the possible scenarios and outcomes of this war. In short, let's get back to work, with a triple effort: on **strategic autonomy**, on **farm to fork**, and on **decarbonisation** and the **Green Deal** in general. All the major EU initiatives we have worked on recently are now becoming not just policies "important because of our future": they are suddenly crucially important because of the need to ensure Europe's survival and prosperity.

Kęstutis Kupšys, LT-Gr. III  
REX Member



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