



THE EESC IN THE WORLD

External Relations newsletter

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Dear reader,

Earlier this year, the REX section was working on an opinion on the instrumentalisation of migrants, in response to various challenges that certain EU Member States (Spain, Greece, Lithuania and Poland) have been faced with in the past few years, culminating in last year's events at the EU-Belarusian border. It was exactly then that Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine not only changed the course of modern history, but also prompted the adoption of completely new migration and asylum policies in the EU.

Responding swiftly to the invasion, our Union activated the **Temporary Protection Directive** (TPD) to assist millions of Ukrainian refugees, granting them residency rights and access to the labour market, housing, social welfare and medical assistance. The TPD also ensures that unaccompanied children have the right to legal guardianship and education, and establishes a protection status with reduced formalities in order to reduce pressure on national asylum systems. There is now a **solidarity platform** for Member States where countries can exchange information about their reception capacity: the platform, coordinated by the European Commission, aims to **promote balance** between EU countries in the effort to host new arrivals from Ukraine.

All of this has been taking place while approval of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, proposed in September 2020, of the new regulation addressing situations of instrumentalisation in migration and asylum, and of the revised Schengen Borders Code, both presented by the Commission in December 2021, is still pending.

In its opinion **REX/554 on Instrumentalisation of migrants**, which you can read about in more detail in this issue of our newsletter, the EESC stresses the dire need for more solidarity in migration policies: among Member States and towards the instrumentalised migrants, who were the victims and not the cause of the hybrid threat initiated in November 2021 by the government of Belarus. The opinion also asks for the new instruments to consider these principles – the Pact and the regulation should take account of new developments, in the spirit of Union values including unity, solidarity and respect for human rights.

The EESC welcomes the current change of pace in EU migration policies, and the REX section asked for a **more rational and cohesive migration policy at European level** during its meeting on 12 May, dedicated to the topic [**Towards a Europeanisation of migration policy?**](#) and attended by the Commission's vice-president for promoting our European way of life, **Margaritis Schinas**.

On 19 July, the REX section met for the first time outside of Brussels: we organised a conference in Kraków on the subject [Relief and reconstruction of Ukraine and its European perspective](#) with the participation of EU and Ukrainian civil society, to pay tribute to all those who are helping refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as to discuss the reconstruction of Ukraine. You can read more on this subject matter in the present issue of our newsletter.

I sincerely hope that the EU will be able to continue manifesting its capacity to swiftly adapt to rapidly changing events, thus proving itself to be a credible international player in the field of migration and asylum, and will showcase increased levels of solidarity, as seen during the COVID-19 crisis but also, and most importantly, in response to Putin's war against Ukraine.



Dimitris Dimitriadis
REX Section President

Events



European civil society continues to support Ukraine

Ukraine is still under attack, and the EU is continuing its support to the country in the struggle for its European future, democracy and sovereignty. Following the various initiatives reported in [issue No 2](#) of our newsletter, the EESC has taken further steps to assist Ukrainian civil society, with the creation of a [Ukrainian civil society hub](#) at its premises: the official handover ceremony was held on 20 April, and various organisations are now working there.

On 20 April, the **EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform held its 11th meeting**. Ukrainian and European members adopted a [Joint Declaration](#) on assistance to refugees, humanitarian corridors and investigation of war crimes, and also on the future society of Ukraine, with its integration into the EU, post-war reconstruction and the need to continue the social and economic development of the country.

On 19 May, EESC President Christa Schweng and REX President Dimitris Dimitriadis issued a [statement following the adoption of the](#)

[Commission's Communication Ukraine Relief and Reconstruction](#), in which they praised the Commission's dual approach of giving urgent help to finance Ukraine's immediate needs while designing plans for its longer-term reconstruction, in line with the EESC's resolution on the *War in Ukraine and its economic, social and environmental impact* (see [issue No 2](#) of our newsletter).

On 16 June, the Committee's plenary session adopted a second resolution on Ukraine, entitled [Ukraine – from relief to reconstruction – proposals by the European civil society](#) which, a week ahead of the EU Council Summit, expressed strong support for the country's EU candidate status, and advocated a reconstruction of the country able to make Ukraine a strong, green, resilient and sustainable European partner.

On 19 July, the REX Section held its meeting in the Polish city of Kraków, with a conference on [Relief and reconstruction of Ukraine and its European perspective](#). Kraków has been at the forefront of the European response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the REX section decided to meet there as a sign of solidarity and closeness to the municipal authorities and to the many civil society organisations which have made enormous efforts to successfully welcome and integrate Ukrainian refugees. After the opening remarks by EESC President **Christa Schweng**, our members held an exchange with **representatives of national and local authorities** as well as of **humanitarian organisations**. This gave them a clear picture of the situation on the ground, of the **needs of Ukraine to keep the country running** despite invasion and destruction, and also of the **future needs on the path to reconstruction of Ukraine after the war and to its European integration**. Former EP President **Jerzy Buzek** inspired the audience underlining the potential of European action when all member states act in unity and solidarity. From the vaccination campaign to fight COVID-19 and the Green Deal (in which Ukraine is already integrated) to the war response with a substantial financial and even military support agreed upon almost overnight, the EU has proved its ability to act quickly and efficiently. It is now necessary to continue with resolute policies to fight the looming world food crisis due to the evil aggression against Ukraine and to reconstruct and integrate the country into the

EU. The EESC members who intervened in the debate expressed the support of European civil society for the reconstruction and EU membership of Ukraine, at the same time pointing out that the process will have several stages and that compliance with EU law, for example concerning labour rights and environmental standards, will need to be checked.

Finally, the EESC has a dedicated page for all its [actions on Ukraine](#), which you can visit for further updates.



EESC mission to the US and UN

On 27-30 June, a **high-level mission** led by EESC President Christa Schweng, and including members Stefano Mallia, Oliver Röpke, Séamus Boland, Tanja Buzek, Christian Moos and José Ignacio Salafranca, visited Washington and New York in order to meet United States authorities and stakeholders, as well as United Nations officials.

At the current critical juncture, it is important for the world's leading economies and democracies to deepen their political and economic cooperation, with the goal of protecting our universal values and prosperity. As the house of European organised civil society, the EESC needs to further strengthen relations with relevant American interlocutors. The high-level mission to Washington was an opportunity to hold discussions with US organisations and authorities on the role and contribution of EU and US civil society in shaping a **renewed and stronger transatlantic relationship**. Our president and members met American civil society organisations and officials, including **Uzra Zeya**, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, who had visited the Committee in November last year (see [issue No 1](#) of our newsletter).

The EESC delegation then caught a train to New York, where they met **Abdulla Shahid**, President of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, and other UN officials, to establish closer contacts with the United Nations and explore avenues for future cooperation.

The mission was organised with the kind support of the EU Delegation in Washington D.C. and the EU Delegation to the UN in New York.



Towards a new relationship with the UK

On 28 June, the EU-UK Follow-up Committee held its 6th meeting since it was established last year. EESC members were able to learn more about citizens' rights thanks to presentations by the 3million (the largest organisation representing EU citizens in the UK), British in Europe (the umbrella organisation representing UK citizens in the EU) and the EU Delegation in the United Kingdom. During the meeting, representatives of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) presented a project aimed at building a new relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom. An exchange of views was also held with the UK Civil Society Alliance, a new project set up to empower civil society organisations from across the UK.



EU-ACP Follow-up Committee meeting in Lisbon

On 23-24 June, the [EU-ACP Follow-up Committee](#) met in Lisbon in what was the first in-person meeting since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Delegates from Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific and EESC Members gathered in the context of the pending signature of the Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS).

The event was mainly dedicated to the role of civil society in the partnership as well as to the paradigm of interculturality. Participants went on a field visit to the Portuguese High Commission for Migration, a public institution dealing with public, transversal and sectorial migration policies relevant for the integration of migrants and with management and showcasing of the diversity between cultures, ethnics and religions.



EU DAG on Korea prepared for upcoming meeting in Seoul

The [24th EU DAG meeting under the EU-Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement](#) took place on 17 June 2022. DG Trade updated the EU DAG on the implementation of the TSD Chapter and the follow-up of the recommendations of the Panel of Experts regarding South Korea's ratification and implementation of ILO core conventions. Guest speaker Professor Ramon Pacheco Pardo gave a presentation on the Presidential election aftermath. The EU DAG members also discussed the elaboration of a desk study on platform work in the framework of the preparations of the upcoming joint meeting (Civil Society Forum and workshop) with the Korean counterpart. The joint meeting has been confirmed to take place on 13-14 September in Seoul.



REX in Geneva at the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference

The 12th WTO Ministerial Conference took place in Geneva from 12 to 17 June, with a 36-hour extension decided mid-conference to give negotiators more time to reach agreements on most dossiers. The conference concluded successfully, with agreement on a [package of key trade initiatives](#), including the extension of the 24-year-old moratorium on e-commerce tariffs and restrictions, confirmation of the **TRIPS waiver on COVID-19 vaccine** production, provisions on **food security**, an agreement on fisheries subsidies aimed at illegal, unreported and over-fishing, and a joint commitment towards a reform process for the World Trade Organization.

A representative from the REX unit was in Geneva to follow the work and attend the daily debriefs that WTO officials hosted for NGOs and civil society organisations. NGOs and CSOs made sure their voice was heard and provided input and criticisms on all open dossiers, including on WTO reform and how to make it more inclusive and receptive of civil society contributions.



EU-Canada DAG on the environmental impact of trade

On 7 June, the EU-Canada DAG established under the Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) held its 12th meeting, for an update by DG TRADE on the latest developments in the EU-Canada trade relations, including the trade and sustainable development chapter (TSD) and the generalised scheme of preferences (GSP). During the meeting, a representative of the World Conservation Monitoring Centre under the UN Environment Programme (UNEP-WCMC) gave a presentation on how the Centre assesses the environmental impact of trade. In addition, the EU-Canada DAG discussed the draft CETA work plan on TSD and continued the planning of a joint workshop with the two Canadian DAGs.



1st EU-Morocco Joint Advisory Group meeting

On 2 June, the [EU-Morocco Joint Advisory Group](#) held its first official meeting since its establishment in May 2017. The agenda included a presentation on the EESC's information report [REX/538](#) – **Trade relations between the EU and its Southern Mediterranean partners**, an update on the economic situation in Morocco with a special focus on the **tourism sector**, and a briefing on the EU's Trade Policy Review and the prospects for a **new partnership** between the EU and Morocco. In addition, the members of the EU-Morocco Joint Advisory Group adopted a joint roadmap and agreed on **energy transition** as their priority topic for the next meetings.



Euromed Summit in Morocco

The [2022 Euromed Summit](#) of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions took place in **Marrakesh** on 31 May and 1 June. It gathered more than 100 civil society representatives from the whole Mediterranean region. The event was opened by EESC President Christa **Schweng** and by the president of the Moroccan Economic, Social and Environmental Council **Ahmed Réda Chami**, alongside the Moroccan Minister of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family **Aawatif Hayar** and the Deputy Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean **Abdelkader El Khissassi**. This year, the summit was dedicated to *COVID-19: The role of civil society in the reconstruction and resilience of the Euro-Mediterranean region*. The final version of EESC **information report** [REX/537](#) on the same topic will take account of the debates held during the summit. In addition, participants discussed the Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood and listened to an update on major Euro-Mediterranean networks.



Young people in the Western Balkans

The [EESC's Western Balkans Follow-up Committee](#) held its [annual external meeting](#) accompanied by a [hearing with local civil society organisations](#) from Bosnia and Herzegovina at the EU Delegation in Sarajevo on 24 May. The [hearing](#) was attended by more than 60 participants, who expressed their views on the state of civic and social dialogue, media freedom and the fight against disinformation, as well as the labour market, focussing on young people. The [report from the hearing](#) has been distributed to all the participants and relevant stakeholders.

Meanwhile, the EESC is preparing an **opinion on Youth Policy in the Western Balkans**, as you can read below in this issue of our newsletter.



EU and Central American DAGs ask for more attention for urgent problems

On 23-24 May, the six Central American DAGs and the European Union DAG (advisory bodies to the Parties of the Association Agreement between the EU and Central America) held a **workshop** to discuss post-COVID recovery, with presentations from experts in the field of regional integration and digital transition. The workshop was followed by an online **joint meeting**, during which the seven DAGs discussed challenges and opportunities for trade and sustainable development and adopted a [Joint Declaration](#) ahead of the **Civil Society Forum** on 3 June. The declaration calls for more attention for labour and human rights in Central American countries and points to the existing problems that have become even more urgent because of the COVID pandemic. DAG members explicitly ask for the formal establishment of **mechanisms for direct dialogue** between the Trade and Sustainable Development Board and the Parties' Advisory Groups and express the hope that this direct dialogue will already be possible in 2022.



Fact-finding mission to Côte d'Ivoire

On 4-6 May, a delegation of the EU-ACP Follow-up Committee went to Côte d'Ivoire on a fact-finding mission. The main goal of the mission was to contribute to the development of a national civil society platform: this is an important first step to allow for the participation of Ivorian civil society in the establishment of the **EU-Côte d'Ivoire interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)**. The delegation had 11 meetings with a total of 39 organisations (including the Economic, Social, Environmental and Cultural Committee of Côte d'Ivoire), 121 stakeholders, and 3 international organisations (Delegation of the European Union, International Labour Office, FAO). It also went on a field visit to a cooperative of fish traders and fish product processors.

During the debriefing, REX member and head of mission **Carlos Trindade** pointed out that the country had a lively and active civil society, but that it was in need of more information, especially on the EPA, and more funding to develop capacity and expertise. The EESC will contact the European Commission in that connection.

A platform should be established with all civil society organisations, in order to address both cross-cutting and sectoral subjects.

Looking to the future, the mission members are in favour of setting up a committee to organise the Ivorian side, bringing together all the CSOs and social partners. The EESC will also start the necessary discussions to participate in a joint platform.



The EESC and the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM)

The [6th CARIFORUM-EU Consultative Committee meeting](#) took place in **Barbados** on 4 May. The main points on the agenda included Post-Cotonou with a focus on CARIFORUM, the second five-year review of the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement, the EU Trade Policy Review with a focus on trade and sustainable development and its implications for CARIFORUM, and the impact of COVID-19 and of the war in Ukraine on trade between the EU and CARIFORUM. The [Joint Statement](#) reiterates the call for the application of the regional preference clause, for the possibility for the consultative committee to initiate a complaint procedure, for the facilitation of the temporary entry of natural persons and for a comprehensive follow-up on deficiencies revealed by the second five-year review.



Participation of the EESC in the EuroLat and meetings with Latin American partners

[Latin America Follow-up Committee](#) chair Josep Puxeu Rocamora, together with Dumitru Fornea and Francisco Silva, attended the 14th EuroLat plenary session in Buenos Aires, **Argentina**, on 11-14 April. EuroLat is the parliamentary assembly of the Bi-regional Strategic Partnership between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean; the EESC has a cooperation protocol with EuroLat, which provides for the participation of three Committee members in EuroLat meetings, with the status of permanent observers. Our members were also received by the Head of the EU Delegation, Ambassador Amador Sánchez Rico, held separate meetings with representatives of all three sectors of Latin American civil society, and participated in a high-level event organised in Casa Rosada, the seat of the President of Argentina, with the Argentinian Social and Economic Council established in February last year.



European and Russian civil society in the face of war

The invasion of Ukraine also marked a turning point for Russian society, as Putin's regime has become even more oppressive to its own citizens: the last bastions of free press have been shut down or forced into exile, anti-war protesters are imprisoned and free civil society silenced.

On 22 April, the EESC's EU-Russia Follow-up Committee started a common reflection by the European institutions on the support the EU can give to free Russian civil society, whose representatives are often forced to seek safe haven in Europe. In their exchanges on the topic **Looking for an interlocutor. How can the EU reach out to Russian civil society in times of war and censorship?**, the EESC, the European Commission and the European Parliament agreed on the importance of continuous support to Russian civil society both in the country and in exile.

MEP **Andrius Kubilius**, Chair of the Delegation to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly and Standing Rapporteur on Russia, pointed out that security in the European continent was only possible if there was democracy in Russia, and that that day would come if we showed Russian citizens they could have a normal life in a normal country. **Jon Kyst**, Head of Sector in the Russia Division at the EEAS, explained what the EU was doing to help the diaspora, while **Ralph du Long** from the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (a federation of Russian civil society organisations based in Germany but with many members in Russia), asked for an **EU special envoy for Russian civil society** to be created. EESC members present at the meeting observed that the EU should do more to combat Russian disinformation, particularly using innovative communications media. All participants agreed, as Follow-up Committee President **Simo Tiainen** put it, that "contacts with Russia should continue; it is not an option to stop them".



Montenegro needs national consensus to progress towards EU accession

During the [15th EU-Montenegro Civil Society Joint Consultative meeting](#), held in Brussels on 11 April, JCC members discussed EU-Montenegro relations and the accession negotiations with the EU, in particular Cluster 1: The fundamentals of the accession process, with a special focus on economic criteria, public procurement, statistics and financial control, as well as the situation of civil society in Montenegro. They also adopted a [joint declaration](#) in which they called on Montenegrin political parties to depart from excessive polarisation, stop the practice of boycotting the national parliament and negotiate to form a new and stable government as soon as possible, so that Montenegro, the most advanced of all EU candidate countries, can make vital reforms to earn its place in the EU.

Upcoming events

On 1 September, as a result of contacts in the context of the Eastern Partnership with **Armenia**, the EESC will take part in the inaugural meeting of the EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform in Yerevan.

On 7 September, the Euromed Follow-Up Committee will meet in **Crete** to debate the *Blue Economy in the Mediterranean region*. The meeting will be opened by the governor of the Crete Region, by the mayor of Chania and by the deputy secretary-general for water, environment and blue economy of the Union for the Mediterranean.

On 14 September, the REX Section will be devoted to the subject of **cultural diplomacy**, and section members will discuss own-initiative opinion [REX/548](#) on *Cultural diplomacy as a vector of EU external relations. New partnerships and role of CSO*.

On 16 September, as a follow-up to own-initiative opinion [REX/553](#) on *Youth Policy in the Western Balkans, as part of the Innovation Agenda for the Western Balkans*, the EESC will hold a high-level civil society conference in Prague on **Youth Policy in the Western Balkans – An essential element for the future of the region and Europe**, organised in cooperation with the European Commission, the Regional Cooperation Council and the Czech Presidency of the EU.

On 26-29 September, EESC President Christa Schweng will go on a mission to **Buenos Aires**, where she will meet the Argentinian Economic and Social Council established in February.

On 16 November, the REX Section will dedicate its meeting to **Latin America**, discussing own-initiative opinion REX/552 on *Post-COVID recovery in Latin America*.

On 30 November-2 December, an EESC delegation will participate in the **EuroLat** Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, which will meet in Brussels.

Opinions in the spotlight

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





On 16 May, a hearing on REX/553 brought together representatives from EU institutions, youth networks and organisations from the Western Balkans (WB). With youth as one of the main policy areas of the Innovation Agenda for the Western Balkans, participants reaffirmed the importance of young people to the future of the region and reflected on how to transform "brain drain" into "brain circulation" to stimulate economic growth and development in the WB.

On 9 June the REX section adopted the opinion with 65 votes in favour and only one abstention. **Ionuț Sibian** (rapporteur) and **Andrej Zorko** (co-rapporteur) stressed that brain drain in the WB should be reversed into brain circulation, with a significant role for the Youth Guarantee. Young people should be more involved in decision-making and in social partners' activities such as collective bargaining. There is a lack of data on youth in the WB, and public authorities should allocate a larger budget to youth policies. **Srđan Majstorović**, chair of the Governing Board of the European Policy Centre (CEP) from Belgrade, gave an overview on EU enlargement policy: he explained the proposal for staged accession, comparing it to the ideas recently presented by Charles Michel and Emmanuel Macron. He also talked about the new momentum in enlargement policy marked by the applications from Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to join the EU. In the discussion that followed, some members mentioned the need to include WB young people in all relevant EU programmes and projects: education should be linked to labour market needs, putting an emphasis on VET and on self-employment measures. They also suggested that the opinion should mention the "youth test" currently under EU discussion with a link to the 2022 European Year of Youth.

REX/553 will be followed up by a High-Level Western Balkans Civil Society Conference in Prague on 15 September 2022, during the Czech Presidency of the EU Council. [Read more](#)

REX/554 Instrumentalisation of migrants



Last year, the Belarusian regime led by Alyaksandr Lukashenka attracted migrants from Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries. Upon their arrival, the Belarusian authorities pushed them across the EU border with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, in an attempt to destabilise the Union. In this obvious case of instrumentalisation of migrants, human beings were exploited in retaliation for European criticism of the rigged elections held in Belarus in 2020. The EU reacted to this instrumentalisation by intervening with airlines in departure and transit countries, as well as informing potential migrants of the trap they were being lured into. The Commission then issued a Joint Communication proposing measures intended to prevent future cases.

In its opinion on the Joint Communication, the EESC underlines that the hybrid threat put in place by the Belarusian authorities was not the first case of state-sponsored instrumentalisation of migrants, and that the European response should be based on solidarity and responsibility sharing among Member States. The term "threat" can be applied to destabilisation efforts by third countries,

but not to the migrants themselves, who need assistance in line with the EU's principles in the fields of human rights, protection of migrants and the right to asylum. These principles should be taken into account in the new Pact on Migration and Asylum and in the proposed Regulation addressing instrumentalisation. Finally, humanitarian civil society organisations should not be criminalised for their acts of solidarity, and maximum freedom of information must be ensured to independent media in the affected areas. [Read more](#)

[REX/557](#) Implementation and enforcement of the UK Withdrawal Agreement

At its June plenary, the EESC adopted an opinion supporting the European Commission's decision to launch [infringement proceedings](#) against the UK for breaking international law. The proceedings were opened in response to the country's non-compliance with parts of the Protocol on Northern Ireland.

Other opinions adopted by the July plenary session

[REX/543](#) Analysis of 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 necessary safeguards

Ongoing opinions and information reports

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

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

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

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

[REX/561](#) Trade partnerships

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

Video on Strategic Foresight

On 1 February 2022, the REX section held a meeting on **Strategic foresight: a vision for the future of Europe**, during which prominent speakers from the European institutions, international think tanks and civil society discussed topics connected with the new role of the EU as a global actor and how civil society can contribute to better anticipation of crucial events. A 7-minute video has been produced summarising the main outcomes of the day. [Watch the video](#)



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