

**European Commission 2018 work programme:**

**Contribution of the Liaison Group**

**Introduction**

More than just an annual exercise, the contribution of the Liaison Group to the statement of the EESC on the Commission's future work programme is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that the European networks gathered in the Liaison Group are a force of and for proposals. They are advocating their particular interest which is the general interest.

In these times there is no doubt that the EU has to deliver in order to reconnect with the citizens who too often turn away from Europe and its institutions as they hear to many times that EU is the problem and not part of the solution.

After years of fiscal and financial consolidation, of drastic and austere policies in the so-called 'programme countries', after having too long time considered that everything is under market rules and competition, a new form of awareness raising seems to take place: the need to balance both economic and social imperatives.

Without being nostalgic, it is just another and renewed form of social market economy. There is renewed commitment to the European social model in its different forms.

Commission President Juncker has presented five scenarios to be debated at the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. Probably there will not be public support for institutional reforms, but if the EU can present concrete steps to reply to the feeling of insecurity in turbulent times, there is a chance of regaining trust and confidence, of creating a new dynamic.

Upward convergence is possible in rule-based business and trade, investment in social protection, education, culture. It is always a matter of will. People want deeds; not only words, and who better than civil society will be able to be the bridge builder?

The Liaison Group as associated body of the EESC wants to bring in its competences in divergence and makes proposals that a sustainable development of the EU is possible. The Sustainable Development Goals 2030 shall be inspiration as a new global agenda putting people and their needs first. This is also behind our contributions.

No more wake up calls!

Conny Reuter

Co-Chair of the Liaison Group

**1. A New Boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment**

**European employment strategy**

* EU-wide strategy on unlocking the job creation potential of the social services sector. The social sector is one of the biggest job creators in Europe today, yet it is increasingly struggling to recruit and retain sufficient staff to provide the much needed high-quality services.
* Other issues affecting job creation in the sector are the lack of funding, the brain drain, gender imbalances, in-work poverty, and so on. <http://easpd.eu/en/content/job-creation-and-decent-working-conditions>
* Decent work should be put at the core of the European Employment Strategy in line with the Sustainable Development Agenda, and namely with the implementation of Goal 8.

**Intra EU- mobility**

* The revision of the Posting of Workers directive should ensure equal rights and the duration of posting should not be extended.

**New Skills Agenda for Europe**

* Implementation of the New Skills Agenda n should focus not only on VET and employability, but also on ensuring the development and recognition of the transversal and soft skills of young people. The revision of Europass, key competences for lifelong learning and the inclusion of learning outcomes related to soft skills within the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) are essential.
* The Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP) suggests emphasising the focus on lifelong learning. It is important to tackle youth unemployment and it is also important to provide education for young people, but this is not enough, especially in a fast changing economy. Lifelong learning opportunities and further education are therefore also needed. This is particularly important in the current era of swift developments in digital technology.
* Career development is extremely important in this context and needs to be strengthened and supported at EU level. While we agree that the EU should tackle youth unemployment in particular, greater attention is also needed to adult learning to further improve its provision and access to all.
* Employment for vulnerable groups of all ages, as well as the development of their skills, should remain a priority for the CWP.
* It must be ensured that EU initiatives such as the EU Agenda for Skills or the Youth Guarantee are truly accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities and provide the proper support people may need to be involved in such initiatives.

(More information: <http://easpd.eu/en/content/right-work-and-employment> or <http://easpd.eu/en/content/inclusive-education>)

**European Fund for Strategic Investments**

* The European Fund for Strategic Investments for Social Services needs to be unlocked through a dedicated financial instrument which would help to develop an appropriate ecosystem and increase the attractiveness of investment in social services such as education, training, healthcare and housing. <http://easpd.eu/en/content/european-fund-strategic-investments>

# European Solidarity Corps

* The European Solidarity Corps should be put into operation in close cooperation with existing and experienced international voluntary service organisations and have the learning needs and personal development of young people at its core. Hosting organisations should be given adequate resources to support the learning of volunteers.

**Culture and creative industries**

* The EU has to recognise the potential of culture and the creative industries for job creation and sustainable growth.

**2. A Connected Digital Single Market**

**Digital Single Market**

* The Digital Single Market strategy rightly identifies the opportunities that the digital market opens up for people and businesses in Europe. However, the emphasis is placed on access to goods and services and the potential this represents for growth, leaving one dimension of digital largely ignored, namely the potential that ICT offers for a more engaged and participatory citizenship. A new deliberative and collaborative ICT-enabled democracy model is emerging worldwide and the EU should be at its forefront.
* The Commission should include the use of ICT to foster citizens’ engagement in EU policy-making as part of its Digital Single Market strategy.

**European Accessibility Act**

* It must be ensured that the European Accessibility Act remains a priority for the European Commission in 2018. <http://easpd.eu/en/content/accessibility>

**Education and digital skills**

* There can be no markets without people, so to make a market operate well we need to prepare people for it. We would like to suggest, on the one hand, that further emphasise be given to the role of education (in line with the Paris Declaration 2015), but also, on the other, that further support be given to development of the digital skills and competences required. Digital skills must be mainstreamed in education because it is not enough just to make digital technologies affordable. Digital competences and skills, as well as media literacy, are a prerequisite for meaningful digital participation. While we agree that digital technology brings new opportunities for creativity, employment and business, full and equal access to it can be ensured only through education and lifelong learning.

**Fair remuneration of artists**

* The EU has to ensure a fair remuneration of artists and creatives within the Digital Single Market (fair distribution of copyright revenues).

**3. A Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy**

**Economic and social dimension – SDGs – Culture**

* Climate change cannot be tackled without considering its wider social and economic dimensions. A strong narrative is needed to promote a culture of sustainability that moves producers and citizens to action. A holistic approach to the SDG 2030 agenda must be considered, looking for synergies across policy fields and programmes, including a transversal approach that makes use of culture as a key asset in the delivery of the SDG 2030 Agenda.

**4. A deeper and Fairer Internal Market with a Strengthened Industrial Base**

**Culture**

* Young cultural and creative entrepreneurs, innovative start-ups and cultural organisations can only thrive on a level playing field.
* Market concentration in the cultural and creative market should be carefully examined if Europe wants to build a creative economy fit for the 21st century.
* Cultural and creative industries and organisations require a sustainable funding and finance landscape to thrive. Cultural policies and programmes should differentiate between organisations that have a social mission and take artistic risks and those cultural and creative industries that are geared to the market. Grants are the right funding mechanism for the first, acting as the I+D of the cultural and creative ecosystem; while the second would benefit from match-funding instruments, given that loans, equity and crowdfunding are proving to be insufficient or inappropriate to finance cultural and creative undertakings.

**Digital shift**

* As the digital shift unfolds, global digital monopolies consolidate, hindering fair competition. EU competition policy should be adapted to the digital revolution, including consideration given to supranational fiscal architectures.

**5. A Deeper and Fairer Economic and Monetary Union**

**European Semester**

* The European Commission and National Governments should promote the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) through the European Semester. <http://easpd.eu/en/content/european-semester>

**European Pillar of Social Rights**

* Lifelong learning is a structuring element of the knowledge society and helps to support social cohesion and active citizenship and personal development and well-being, as well as Europe’s efforts towards a smart, inclusive and sustainable competitiveness. A stronger link to education has to be made in the European Pillar of Social Rights to ensure equal access, the same opportunities and better quality of life.
* The pillar should focus on: upward social-convergence across the whole EU; it should comprise updated labour and social standards; it should call for a re-evaluation of the national minimum income schemes; compulsory secondary education and a skills guarantee should be ensured. Furthermore, it should ensure a child guarantee; the EU’s economic governance should be rebalanced with targets set according to the Europe 2020 strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals; the European Social Funds, the Youth Employment Initiative, the Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the most deprived should be strengthened. And lastly, the need for adequate financing to ease economic adjustment processes.
* Link with labour migration: The European Pillar of Social Rights should be a basis to guarantee equal access and equal treatment to any worker and therefore should also cover the case of undocumented migrant workers.

**6. A Reasonable and Balanced Free Trade Agreement with the US**

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**7. An Area of Justice and Fundamental Rights Based on Mutual Trust**

**EU strategy for human rights**

* A comprehensive EU strategy for human rights should be developed with a link to the Sustainable development Goals agenda.

**DIRECTIVE 2004/38/EC – rights on free movement and residence**

* The increasing number of enquiries received by Your Europe Advice in recent years, in particular regarding entry and residence rights, bears witness to the increasing pressures on – and obstacles to – free movement rights in the EU.
* Some of the problems relate to legal loopholes in the text of Directive 2004/38/EC itself, which lays down the conditions for the exercise of free movement rights in the EU. Other problems are due to systematic implementation gaps and pitfalls at national and/or local level. At a crucial juncture where the added value of the EU is being constantly challenged, it is essential to make sure that citizens understand and can benefit from the unique rights bestowed on them by virtue of their EU citizenship.
* According to the latest opinion surveys conducted at EU level, freedom of movement remains the EU achievement most valued by all citizens across EU countries. As such, it should be promoted and better enforced.
* More than ten years after the entry into force of Directive 2004/38/EC, it is time for a review of this piece of legislation to improve its implementation and better enforce free movement rights in the EU. This could take the form of a new Commission communication providing guidance to Members States on better transposition and application of the directive. The last guidelines were provided as far back as 2009 – eight years ago now.

**Citizenship education**

* Education for citizenship and global education need to be made a genuine priority in the European Commission work programme. Citizenship education enables an individual to act as an active and responsible citizen who is respectful of others. It is fundamental to a free, tolerant, fair and inclusive society, to social cohesion, mutual understanding, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and solidarity, as well as equality between women and men.

**Terrorism**

* It must be ensured that fundamental rights/freedoms are taken into account within Europe and EU policy: EU supranational risk assessment and EU action to counter terrorism financing and money laundering should be risk based, proportionate and in line with fundamental rights/privacy rights etc.

**Free movement of capital for cross-border philanthropy**

* Cross-border philanthropy is still hampered by tax and administrative barriers. The European Foundation Centre (EFC) has developed a follow-up project to the 2014 study entitled “Taxation of cross-border philanthropy in Europe after Persche and Stauffer – From landlock to free movement?”. EFC and the Transnational Giving Europe network (TGE) want to encourage countries to operate in line with the non-discrimination principle in a meaningful way. The project will produce user-friendly online information for donors, funders, institutional philanthropy and beneficiaries. The project also aims to raise awareness among Member States, fiscal authorities and the philanthropy/funder/donor community that a simplification of administrative procedures is needed and to discuss innovative proposals for how this could be done.

**Free movement of capital**

* Some countries are discussing restrictions on foreign funding, which could be in conflict with Free Movement of Capital.

**Freedom of expression**

* Violations of freedom of artistic expression are on the rise across Europe. Freedom of expression, creation and dissemination in the cultural field is not equally guaranteed and protected in all Member States.
* Freedom of artistic expression should be monitored and enforced at EU level, as well as explicitly recognised across EU legal frameworks and initiatives.
* Support is needed for civil society organisations actively monitoring violations in the field in order to counterbalance the increasing censorship and the emergence of exclusionary narratives.

**8. Towards a New Policy on Migration**

**Labour migration**

* As highlighted in the EESC Information Report (REX/460) on cooperation with third countries in promoting regular migration to the EU European immigration policy should take a strategic medium and long-term view and focus on providing a holistic and comprehensive approach to open and flexible legal channels for entry into the EU.
* Mobility partnership (MP) agreements with third countries should be more balanced and legally binding for the signatories. To date, priority has been given to security, return, the readmission of irregular migrants and border surveillance. The EU should also offer these countries and their citizens' opportunities for immigration for the purposes of employment or education via legal, flexible and transparent procedures. Similarly, third countries with which MPs are signed must be signatories to the Geneva Refugee Convention, must have asylum structures in place and must be safe countries from the point of view of human rights.
* The fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination against immigrants and minorities must be a political priority for the EU. It is necessary to strengthen national and European laws and to assign new powers to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in Vienna.

**Disabled migrants**

* Planned actions that help to protect and empower refugees with disabilities need to be engineered in the European Agenda on Migration (similarly to the Planned actions contributing to the protection of children in migration), developed hand-in-hand with organisations representing disabled people, migrants (as peers) and – where relevant – support services and other stakeholders.

(More info: <http://easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/discussion_note_-_migrants_with_disabilities_access_to_services_-_final.pdf> )

**Education, integration and recognition of skills**

* The Commission should ensure Member States take measures for the education and integration of migrants. These measures should be similar in methods and substance across EU Member States and be based on research and evidence of success. In particular, policy measures should ensure contact, dialogue and cooperation between the majority population and the incoming migrants.
* We believe that when talking about migrants and refugees we also need to talk about inclusion/integration, in which education plays a vital role. To be able to integrate, to be able to become a part of the society requires language skills as well as education about the country, one’s rights and so on.
* In line with the skills agenda, the focus needs to also be on validation and recognition of skills and competences which could help with employment. Together with social and employment policies, educational policies are a meaningful tool for constructing integrated and cohesive societies. Education is a public good and a human right.

**Promotion of intercultural dialogue**

* Europe is confronted by hyper-diverse societies and will remain so in the future. A migration policy that does not incorporate cultural diversity and education as one of its core principles is bound to exacerbate social and political instability. The active promotion of intercultural dialogue in order to support social cohesion should be recognised within a new migration policy.
* An increase of budget for programmes promoting intercultural dialogue and integration is needed to ensure impact.

**9. A Stronger Global Player**

**Culture**

* The new strategy for international cultural relations should be strengthened at a time of increasing geopolitical tension. Civil society in the cultural field should be recognised as a key player within the strategy, since it promotes the circulation of ideas and values, skills and knowledge, fostering social change at a grassroots level, independently of diplomatic action at governmental level.
* New approaches to cultural exchange are needed: co-creation leading to bidirectional exchange, for example, should be encouraged.
* We encourage promotion of the EESC’s opinion ‘‘Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations’’ under the lead of its rapporteur, Luca Jahier, and the implementation of its ideas wherever possible.

**10. A Union of Democratic Change**

**European Citizens’ Initiative**

* Traditional consultation mechanisms at EU level, and in particular public consultations, have shown their limitations in terms of their ability to reach out to representative samples of the public and capture their voices in policy-making. Their very technical and complex nature discourages citizens from participating in them and they are used essentially by interest groups and networks. The European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI), a unique instrument of participatory democracy at EU level, has also shown its limitations with regard to its potential for EU citizens to set the agenda, also partly due to its complex nature and requirements, which makes it an instrument unfit for an everyday use. If the EU is to win back the trust of its citizens and re-gain its democratic legitimacy, alternative schemes of consultation need to be developed which are citizen-centric and citizen-friendly. The potential of ICT for engaging in a collaborative and regular relationship with citizens based on mutual trust should be analysed and developed.

**Use of Information and Communication Technology**

* The European Commission should not only improve existing methods of citizens’ participation in EU policy-making (ECI, public consultations), but also explore more interactive ways of involving them through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), such as crowdsourcing, in order to increase youth engagement, foster innovation and ensure a mutual learning process.

**Transparency of the trialogue**

* The trialogue between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council should be a transparent process for EU citizens and organisations representing them should be able to receive information on the progress of negotiations.

**Philanthropy**

* Philanthropy and civil society need space in a democracy. There is an indication that regulation is increasingly repressing the activities of civil society and philanthropic entities (in several European countries, whether deliberate or unintentional).
* At the same time, it appears that philanthropic entities do not yet enjoy the full freedom of the internal market when it comes to recognition of legal personality, transfer of seat or non-discriminatory tax questions. Efforts to free up space for cross-border philanthropy through the European Foundation Statute were thwarted by the failure of Member States to reach the unanimity required.

**Culture**

* Broader and more transparent engagement with civil society and a wider range of stakeholders is needed to address the increasing mistrust of citizens towards current systems of governance. The voice of culture is too often sidelined, when crucial contributions could be made in the areas of education, sustainability, home affairs and competition, among others.
* This is of particular importance in the context of the white paper on the Future of Europe, where the place of culture in building a more cohesive Europe and the cultural dimension underpinning the EU project should be considered.
* Democratic change cannot be limited to legal frameworks. Democratic values need to be fostered in a context of increasing social tensions and misinformation. A sharper focus is needed on intercultural dialogue and critical cultural and media literacy across all relevant programmes and policies, including Europe for Citizens, Creative Europe and Education and Training 2020.

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