



Brussels, 15 January 2016

RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS

of the 29th meeting

of the

Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks

held at the Committee building in Brussels

on **25 November 2015**

The Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks held its 29th meeting in Brussels on **25 November 2015**. **Georges Dassis**, president of the European Economic and Social Committee, and **Conny Reuter**, co-chair of the Liaison Group, opened the Liaison Group's 29th meeting, on **Wednesday 25 November, at 10.15 a.m.**

ATTENDANCE LIST (See Appendix)

1. Adoption of the **draft agenda**.

The agenda was adopted.

2. Approval of the **minutes** of the 28th meeting.

The minutes were approved.

3. Statements by the EESC president, **George Dassis**, and the Liaison Group co-chair, **Conny Reuter**.

George Dassis opened the meeting by commenting on the terroristic attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 that had affected citizens' freedoms. He expressed solidarity with the families of all the victims and underlined the importance of avoiding nationalism and xenophobia. He called for reflection over these events, with a view to finding a concrete solution.

Although Europe had to face problems associated with the integration of second-generation youth from Muslim countries, he stressed that this was not a war of civilisations. He noted that freedom of expression and freedom of religion were common rights that should not be attacked.

He concluded by informing the Liaison Group that the Committee had already taken some practical initiatives. The Committee had appointed delegations to 11 EU countries plus one delegation to Turkey, with the aim of reporting on the refugee crisis and on illegal immigration. Their report was expected for February. Members of the Liaison Group should be actively involved.

Conny Reuter thanked Mr Dassis for his introduction and recalled that everyone had been shocked by the attacks, which raised once again the question of freedom of expression. What had happened in Paris was to be expected and was related to the lack of integration. He added that despite many efforts to create a more inclusive and integrated society, the EU institutions had sometimes avoided the problems, focusing instead on fiscal and financial consolidation as well as the respect of the Stability and Growth Pact rules to overcome the crisis.

The need for growth, integration and stability was now very urgent and Europe needed to invest more resources to fight the radicalisation that affected society. He welcomed the EESC initiative of sending 11 delegations to the Member States. Civil society and civil society organisations at European, national, regional and local level had to shoulder their responsibilities as they were closer to the ground and they could give concrete and useful suggestions to politicians in order to find possible solutions to the current situation.

He remarked that these events would impact on the European agenda, shifting it from the Greek economic crisis to immigrants and now to this tragedy. He stressed that this was not a war of civilisations, but that what was at stake were European values versus those based on hatred and exclusion or based on religion.

Mr Reuter concluded by reminding the members of the Liaison Group of the important role they played in facing new social challenges. They should commit to cooperate and make proposals to promote internal peace, integration and stability across Europe.

4. Presentation by the presidents of the sections and other EESC bodies of their working programmes

Conny Reuter invited the presidents of the EESC's sections and other bodies to present their working programmes briefly.

Luca Jahier, president of Group III, distributed a report produced by the *Bertelsmann Foundation*, for his group that presented an analysis of the policies and thematic lines that Group III had been following over the previous five years and describing the initiatives carried out, the challenges for the years ahead and an innovative contribution to the debates within the European public space. Mr Jahier encouraged the audience to provide feedback and additional content.

In the future, Group III's activities would follow these main lines:

- further developing structured vertical and horizontal civil dialogue, ensuring that the Committee remained an open space where civil society could build a real contribution;
- going further into specific issues such as innovation, the social economy, the liberal professions, Europe 2020 and disabilities.

He announced a conference in December 2015 on macro-regional cooperation, entitled *Intermediary Europe at the Heart of the Europe 2020 Strategy: Bringing Europe closer to citizens* on the regional dimension of change. The conference would provide an opportunity to exchange views on how integrated cross-border strategies could contribute directly to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Group III would start working on culture, collaborating with the Bozar, the European Parliament and the Council in order to organise a conference in June 2016.

On the theme of freedom versus security, he presented three key issues that civil society needed to address:

- finding a new balance between citizens' freedoms and the security measures that impacted on people's personal privacy and rights;
- deepening the general debate on a new model of integration and meeting the challenge related to the integration of refugees and second-generation migrants, not forgetting the 30 million people from Muslim countries;
- war and peace: Europe was not at war but surrounded by a large number of conflicts. European countries should avoid conflict and not go to war alone, but within the framework of European solidarity.

Pavel Trantina, president of the SOC section informed members of the goals and working methods of the 11 missions sent to Member States most affected by the refugee crisis. Their aim was to channel concerns and needs and collect best practice from civil society organisations working in the field, acting as a bridge to the European institutions. The first meetings would be held mid-December; national branches of the Liaison Group networks could contribute to these meetings. The results will be discussed at the next SOC section meeting in January.

Mr Trantina listed the three priority topics for the next two and a half years:

- integration of migrants (in the context of the work of the European Migration Forum);

- investment and inclusiveness including social investment, inclusive growth, job creation, better quality working conditions and human capital;
- respect for human fundamental and social rights.

Mr Trantina concluded by proposing to discuss the initiatives that all the different sections could organise together with CSOs and the Liaison Group. He recommended that Committee organise more cross-section meetings, because many of the topics were cross-sectoral, as for example the issues regarding the EU 2020 strategy or poverty indicators.

Pierre Jean Coulon, president of the TEN section presented the main priorities that were linked closely to each other:

- challenges and opportunities linked to the digital strategy for the economy and civil society. Many of the aspects linked to the digital strategy involved civil society. Still today many European citizens had no access to digital services and the digital divide between cities and rural areas was still present;
- implementing the Energy Union for 2030 and tackling the question of energy poverty that affected eighty million people who did not have proper access;
- implementing the White Paper on transport and related issues: accessibility of transport, the shift from personal to public transport, intermodal transport, the price of transport, how to make public transport more affordable and accessible;
- adapting services of general interest to the challenges that our economy and social life have to face (relating to health, essential needs, and security).

In addition, Mr Coulon mentioned three important projects that the section would be working on: the EU dialogue on energy, Smart Cities and Smart Islands. He concluded by pointing out that the co-chair of the Liaison Group would be invited to section meetings in order to be involved in the on-going activities and to have the possibility to report back to the Liaison Group.

Dilyana Slavova, president of the REX section presented the main priorities of the section:

- neighbourhood and candidate countries (with a special focus on refugee flows), relations with third countries, implementation of international protection;
- trade issues: the section would maintain the role of the EESC in the negotiation and monitoring process of on-going and future strategic trade agreements;
- strategic partnerships: the continuity and visibility of the two Round Tables with China and Brazil as well as relations with other countries with which the EU had strategic partnerships.

The main opinions coming up in the future would concern the European agenda on migration, the revision of European trade policy and the European neighbourhood policy. She informed the Liaison Group on the upcoming EUROMED conference.

Seamus Boland, vice-president of the NAT section listed briefly the main priorities of the next two and a half years, notably:

- the common agricultural policy (CAP): simplification strategy;
- revision of the EU emissions trading system;
- participation in the *World Forum on access to lands* in 2016, organised to address the major issues linked to unequal access to land and natural resources;
- rural, mountainous and remote areas linked to the theme of the unbalanced territorial development in Europe;
- food security, food waste and questions related to environmental protection.

The Sustainable Development Observatory would continue to follow the input from the new United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted on the UN world summit on 25 – 27 September.

Conny Reuter remarked that the presentation of the section's programmes to the Liaison Group strengthened the relation between the institutions and civil society organisations. Intensifying and improving the quality of the cooperation on specific issues that came out of this first meeting presented a new challenge for the Liaison Group.

After briefly commenting on recent events, the freedom of speech and extremist movements, **Martin Siecker, president of the INT section** introduced his section, which focused on six areas:

- small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) including social entrepreneurs;
- services, including banking, commerce, insurance and tourism;
- research and innovation;
- industrial policy (both general and sectorial);
- financial services;
- completing the internal market.

The internal market was a corner stone for European integration and sustainable growth. He underlined the importance of social policies and the importance of social entrepreneurship. Social enterprises would play a fundamental role in the economic recovery. He highlighted the annual event *European Consumer Day*, to be held in March.

Etele Baráth, president of Europe2020 Steering Committee, stressed the importance of strengthening collaboration with the Liaison Group. The Europe 2020 Strategy could not be implemented without a proficient exchange with civil society organisations.

He presented the main priorities, notably:

- the transition from the indicator-based approach to economic growth towards sustainable development, in terms of economic, social, environmental and intergenerational changes;
- the importance of increasing synergies between Europe 2020 and sustainable development with a view to merging the two strategies.
- The Steering Committee was also interested in the development of a set of indicators looking "beyond GDP", based on promoting "fair and sustainable well-being".

The limited involvement of non-governmental stakeholders at both EU and national levels remained an important flaw of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Neither the social partners nor other civil society organisations currently played a significant role in the European semester. In order to remedy this, it would be useful to establish decentralised network-based cooperation with the national ESCs and other civil society organisations.

The main economic challenge was to increase competitiveness. Civil society should be involved in the *Investment Plan for Europe* by selecting and implementing projects.

Lucie Studničná, president of the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI), announced that the CCMI would discuss its priorities in its February meeting. Issues related to industrial change across different industries, notably the context of joint technology platforms, would be on the agenda.

Secondly, the CCMI expected to be more involved in the activities of the other sections on specific topics such as migration and integration policies, security issues, the wider issue of industry 4.0, including its social aspects, and questions related to China and their impact on European policies.

Conny Reuter commented on a certain overlap of Liaison Group members with the CCMI membership that would facilitate collaboration.

Michael Smyth, vice-president in charge of the budget, commented on the terrorist attacks in Paris radicalisation and integration failures.

Pedro Almeida Freire, president of the Single Market Observatory (SMO) also opened his remarks with comments on recent events in Paris. Concerning the work programme, he stated that the SMO worked in cooperation with the INT

section and they both shared the same priorities.

The observatory's aim was to study how the single market was developing. He stressed that they already worked with the TEN section on some specific issues and that they were ready to establish cooperation with the Liaison Group.

Conny Reuter then briefly introduced the members of the Liaison Group from civil society organisations and networks.

5. Exchange of views on LG activities in 2016 and the preparation of the next Civil Society Day

In his general remarks, **Conny Reuter** stressed that until two years ago, the Liaison Group had worked mainly on Article 11 of the Treaty to implement civil dialogue. Since then civil society organisations had not only defended this fundamental element of democracy in principle, but they now also had the task to find content to make it more concrete. He identified the need for a new methodology and working methods to improve the way the Liaison Group networks operated.

He also informed the participants that based on the new operating rules regarding the attendance of the Liaison Group meetings, organisations that were not able to participate should give the floor to other organisations that were prepared to be more involved.

Concerning the organisation of the 2016 Civil Society Day, he outlined that it was important to create a more dynamic and interactive conference and to extend it to more than one day, thus giving more space to the civil society organisations. A new format of the Civil Society Day could be an occasion to switch from a very institutional event to an open conference where CSOs could really bring their experiences and contributions.

Regarding the topic of the next Civil Society Day, he took on Luca Jahier's themes (civil liberties, integration and war and peace) under the *leitmotiv* of *How to organise our living together*, specifically new integration policies, defending freedom of speech and people's liberties in a changing world. A working group of Liaison Group members would be set up to frame concrete proposals.

The second big theme of the Liaison Group's work would remain the Riga Roadmap on the implementation of civil dialogue at all levels. The Riga Roadmap would continue to be the basis for the activities, also in anticipation of the Commissions president's speech on the state of the union in September.

The third major theme for the Liaison Group would be the issue of migration and integration policies that were a challenge for our society and whose aspects were dealt with by many of the sections' activities. This topic could also be the core issue of the next edition of the Civil Society Day.

Catherine Naughton, European Disability Forum, thanked everyone for the presentation of their programmes, which gave a lot of possibilities for future cooperation. She also commented on the current security situation

Dominique Guibert, European Association for the Defence of Human Rights, agreed with Luca Jahier regarding the three key questions that civil society needed to address, but suggested adding two points, notably the relationship between economic policy and social rights and the relationship between democracy and citizenship. He opposed the Commission's plan to create an additional debating forum when it did not pay attention to the ones that already existed. According to him, it was very important that sections shared their programmes with civil society organisations but he remarked that in the future it could be more interesting if they could also participate in the framing of the content, so as to be even more engaged.

Conny Reuter expressed his agreement, and highlighted the efforts in recent months to develop more forward-looking working methods.

Dirk Jarre, European Federation of Older Persons, stressed that cooperation between CSOs and the institutions had to be organised on a day-by-day basis and needed a structure. He suggested creating a compendium that collected the section's work programmes in order to share them with networks that were not present. He also asked that each section mark in their programmes where it could be useful for the Liaison Group to contribute.

Conny Reuter suggested that the record of proceedings of the Liaison Group could incorporate the main priorities of the sections' programmes in more detail.

Katherine Heid, Culture Action Europe, expressed her satisfaction about the fact that culture would have an important role in future activities of the Committee. For her, freedom of expression was the key theme for culture.

Philippe Seidel, ~~European Older People's Platform~~ [AGE Platform Europe](#), stressed that social inclusion was crucial for society; hence social rights were a vital theme. It was necessary to work on poverty indicators. He reported on the *Covenant on Demographic Change*, organised in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions (CoR), which focussed on building an inclusive society as a comprehensive answer to Europe's demographic challenge.

Marta Pont Guixha, European Citizen's Action Service, supported the idea of a more interactive Civil Society Day where CSOs could play an active part. In addition, she expressed an interest in the digital issues presented by the TEN section president, as ECAS was currently working on an Erasmus+ project that focussed on the opportunities for citizens' participation.

Audrey Frith, EUCIS-LLL, stressed that it was important to create cooperation with the institutions and other organisations as well as cross-sector consistency, as civil society themes were really cross-cutting. The theme of education and life-long learning was cross-cutting and there are a lot of issues that would be ripe for collaboration.

Concluding the meeting, **Georges Dassis** reflected on the progress made in the Liaison Group since its inception in 2004.

He noted that all the organisations of the Liaison Group would be invited to the events and conferences of the sections although there was no budget to cover their costs.

All the organisations would be informed about the activities of the 11 delegations sent to EU Member States and Turkey, so that they could inform their local representatives in order to launch active cooperation in those places.

He informed members of the Liaison Group that the Committee had asked the Commission for a mandate to draft a proposal on social rights. The answer was still pending, but he promised the Liaison Group that it would play an active part.

The Civil Society Day could gradually be developed into a longer conference called Civil Society Days, dedicated to civil society, an open doors event where institutions and civil society organisations could meet. He would welcome the Liaisons Group's input as to the content and format of the conference.

He invited Pierluigi Brombo to briefly present the new information brochure on the Liaison Group as well as other communication tools produced by the secretariat.

The president closed the meeting at 12.20 p.m.

*

* *

APPENDIX

LIAISON GROUP WITH EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

Wednesday, 25 November 2015, at 10 a.m.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

• **Members of the Liaison Group**

EESC representatives

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Mr Georges Dassis | EESC President – Co-chair of the Liaison Group |
| Mr Pedro Almeida Freire | President of the Single Market Observatory |
| Mr Etele Baráth | President Europe 2020 Steering Committee |
| Mr Seamus Boland | EESC member |
| Mr Jean-Pierre Coulon | President of the TEN section |
| Mr Luca Jahier | Group III President |
| Mr Martin Siecker | President of the INT section |
| Mr Jan Simons | EESC member |
| Ms Dilyana Slavova | President of the REX section |
| Mr Michael Smyth | EESC Vice-President |
| Ms Lucie Studničná | President of the CCMI section |
| Mr Pavel Trantina | President of the SOC section |

Representatives of European civil society organisations and networks

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Mr Conny Reuter | Co-Chair of the Liaison Group |
| Mr Christos Avdellias | Union of European Federalists |
| Ms Gabriella Civico | Director of the European Volunteer Centre |
| Mr Romain Chave | Junior Project Manager of the International Association of Mutualities |
| Ms Emmanuelle Faure | European Affairs Senior Officer at the European Foundation Centre |
| Ms Audrey Frith | Director of the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning |
| Mr David Garrahy | Head of Policy and Advocacy, European Youth Forum |
| Mr Dominique Guibert | European Association for the Defence of Human Rights |
| Ms Marta Pont Guixha | European Citizen Action Service |
| Ms Katherine Heid | Head of Political Development, Culture Action Europe |
| Mr Dirk Jarré | President of the European Federation of Older Persons |
| Mr Anton Lazarus | Actions and Network Officer of the Union of European Federalists |
| Ms Catherine Naughton | Director of the European Disability Forum |
| Mr Philippe Seidel | Age Platform Europe |

| |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Members of the Liaison Group absent – apologies received |
|---|

EESC representatives

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Ms Gabriele Bischoff | Group II President |
| Ms Brenda King | President of the Sustainable Development Observatory |
| Mr Jacek Krawczyk | Group I President |
| Mr Xavier Lobo | EESC Vice-President |
| Mr Carlos Manuel Trindade | President of the Labour Market Observatory |
| Mr Joost Van Iersel | President of the ECO section |

Representatives of European civil society organisations and networks

| | |
|--|--|
| Mr Patrice Collignon | Director of the international association Rurality-Environment-Development |
| Ms Assya Kavrakova | Director of the European Citizen Action Service |
| Ms Agnès Mathis Cooperatives Europe | Deputy Director of the EU Coordination Committee of |
| Ms Barbara Steenbergen | Member of the General Secretariat, International Union of Tenants |
| Ms Agnes Uhreczky | Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union |
