



Brussels, 22 December 2016

RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS

of the 30th meeting

of the

Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks

held in the Committee building, Brussels

on **8 November 2016**

The Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks held its 30th meeting in Brussels, **at 10.30 a.m. on Tuesday 8 November. Georges Dassis**, president of the European Economic and Social Committee, and **Conny Reuter**, co-chair of the Liaison Group, opened the meeting,

ATTENDANCE LIST (See Appendix)

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The agenda was adopted.

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

George Dassis opened the meeting by making a statement on the refugee and migrant crisis, regretting that certain Member States were disobeying a Council Resolution by refusing to take in refugees, to whom the EU had a legal and moral obligation.

He continued by expressing his disappointment with regard to the Brexit vote, which he felt had been obtained by deceiving the British people. He noted that a democratic decision by the British people had to be respected, but recalled the recent decision by the High Court. He conveyed his concern about peace in Northern Ireland, as well as the situation of Polish workers in the UK. He cautioned that, if the UK were to be given special status, there was no guarantee other Member States might not follow in its footsteps.

He then informed the Liaison Group that the Committee had been consulted on the Social Pillar, and that the Committee recommended it be extended to the whole EU.

He concluded with a comment on the worrying situation in Turkey, whose president was violating citizens' fundamental rights.

Conny Reuter thanked Mr Dassis and expressed his agreement with everything he had said.

He then spoke of a change in our society and the shrinking civic space, mentioning the radicalisation of public discourse.

He went on to express his concern that Donald Trump might win the US elections, setting off a domino effect across Europe. Mr Reuter believed that the basis for this radicalisation included a lack of balance in European society, growing inequality and major social problems.

In Mr Reuter's view, the Civil Society Days should broach themes such as the Europe we wanted and how to reconnect the public with the work of the European institutions.

He concluded by thanking Mr Dassis for the opportunity he had had to speak at the EESC's Plenary Session in October, in reply to Mr Juncker and as part of the debate on free movement.

3. **Approval of the minutes of the 29th meeting**

The minutes were approved.

4. **Presentation by presidents of sections and other EESC bodies of their work programmes for 2017**

George Dassis invited the presidents of the EESC's sections and other bodies to briefly present their work programmes.

Joost Van Iersel, ECO section president, listed four issues:

- European Monetary Union (EMU), where he believed some progress had been made regarding improved and increasingly "Europeanised" surveillance of the banking sector, active policy-making by the ECB and strict discipline among most Member States in their financial and economic management. He noted that the EESC was one of the very few who had called for a political pillar for EMU;
- Taxation: noting the subsidiarity principle and Member States' wish to keep control, he stressed that the internal market could not function without a common denominator in tax affairs. Several proposals by the EC were on the table and the ECO section was working on them;
- Banking sector: the need to promote a full banking union in Europe in order to create stability; and
- Regional and cohesion policy: he underlined the role of cities, as a balance to the focus on rural areas.

Standing in for Pavel Trantina, **Krzysztof Balon, SOC section vice-president**, focused on six points:

- The Youth Initiative, especially the Youth Solidarity Corps;
- The pillar of social rights;
- Implementation of the European Agenda on migration;
- The Labour Market Observatory, especially as regards the impact on employment of the digital transition and a low-carbon economy, and the new opportunities offered by an efficient and green economy;
- The integration of young people into the labour market; and
- The effectiveness of European social funding in tackling poverty and social exclusion by using cross-financing between them. Furthermore, discussion platforms on funds post 2020 should be created.

He concluded by asking the Liaison Group organisations to invite EESC members to their meetings and conferences.

Dilyana Slavova, REX section president, highlighted a recent initiative on the Western Balkans. Before the end of 2016, two conferences with the ILO, one on the Future Work Initiative and another on social aspects of the free trade agreements being signed by the EU (CETA and TTIP), were on the agenda.

The main priorities for 2017 were:

- The European Neighbourhood Policy; and
- Trade.

She concluded that there would also be several conferences and events (including an EU-China round table) and hearings on two priority opinions, one on cultural diplomacy and another on Turkey. Both would be open to CSOs.

Brendan Burns, representing the NAT section, listed the following priorities:

- Balanced territorial development and the revitalisation of Cork (Cork +20), including road infrastructure, mobile broadband, etc.;
- Agricultural trade (in collaboration with the REX section);
- Sustainability, including sustainable agricultural production, food security and sustainability of the agro-food supply chain; and
- Preparations for the CAP reform.

He concluded that certain topics such as the circular economy affected everyone, leading to closer cooperation across sections.

Martin Siecker, INT section president, outlined three main points on the work programme for 2017:

- The permanent study group on social economy enterprises, a fast-growing sector that was the only one not to be affected negatively by the crisis. Efforts would focus on launching a social business initiative allowing funding for social economy enterprises;
- The importance and added value of a more competitive, green and fair economy; and
- The Single Market, especially the services directive and the posting of workers directive.

He concluded by stating that, jointly with the ECO section, the INT section would be examining tax evasion, a problem that concerned not only businesses, but individuals too.

Luca Jahier, Group III president, announced that two extraordinary Group meetings were planned under the Maltese and Estonian presidencies. The Maltese meeting would focus on evaluation of Malta's participation in the EU and a pilot project on a code of ethics for the professions, a sector which needed to be given a higher profile.

He outlined four main themes for Group III's work programme:

- Liberal professions, including a seminar in December;
- Sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda;

- The social economy, where progress had been made, but which was not even included in the EC's work programme; and
- A study on developments in organised civil society in the EU, including a focus on the development of different forms of participation (pending approval by the Bureau).

Brenda King, Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) president, informed members about the following priorities:

- A detailed response to the EC's communication on the 'Next Step for a Sustainable European Future', scheduled for publication in 2017;
- The SDO was keen to see sustainable development goals incorporated into a review of the EU 2020 strategy and the European semester. She emphasised the need for an improved participatory process in sustainable development and suggested securing this by means of a European Sustainable Development Forum, which she hoped would be set up in 2017;
- Climate policy (especially in the wake of COP22): she spoke of the difficulties for civil society to act in this area. A partnership with the Committee of the Regions, OECD and Committee 21 would lead to numerous conferences, including a side event at COP22; and
- Greening and decarbonising the economy: the SDO was hoping to launch, in cooperation with the EC, the European Circular Economy Platform in the first quarter of 2017.

She concluded by emphasising the need for greater focus on the social dimension of sustainable development, instead of concentrating only on the economic and environmental aspects.

Gabriele Bischoff, Group II president, expressed concern about what she believed was a severe value crisis in Europe, which was worse than a political or social crisis. In support of this, she cited the EU's inability to deal with the migrant crisis, the populist discourse present even in a Council decision, as well as the alarming situation in Turkey.

She briefly listed the priorities for Group II:

- Fair mobility for workers and the general public and fair conditions for migrants;
- A strong social dimension in legislation, capable of delivering social progress. She cited the Social Pillar and how it had raised expectations but appeared to be unable to fulfil them. In this regard, she stressed that if the EU did not create a project or initiative that was positive for Europeans, it would lose support;
- The transition into the digital age; and
- A fair globalisation and trade policy.

Conny Reuter agreed with Ms Bischoff, and stressed the importance of a positive message and reconnecting people with the European institutions.

Etele Baráth, Europe 2020 Steering Committee president, expressed disappointment about the mid-term review of Europe 2020.

He thanked Mr Reuter for the Liaison Group's contribution to the Europe 2020 report and stressed the importance of strengthening the European budget and focusing more on public expenditure.

Mr Baráth believed it was important to understand how best to participate in the European Semester process in order to strengthen civil society participation.

Pedro Almeida Freire, Single Market Observatory (SMO) president, stressed that the Observatory's priority was the digital single market, followed by the energy market.

The SMO had been working on a report on transposition practices, but would be devoting the next three years to the digital single market.

5. Presentation of the Liaison Group-CSO's contribution to the Europe 2020 Integrated Report

The Liaison Group took note of the document outlining the contribution to the Europe 2020 Integrated Report.

6. Exchange of views on the preparation of next Civil Society Days

Conny Reuter announced that previous discussions in the CSO part of the Liaison Group had given rise to the idea of focusing the Civil Society Days on the "shrinking civil society space", but noted that, following today's discussion, it might be better to focus on "The Europe we want and the Europe we need".

Dominique Guibert (AEDH) agreed that the theme should be "The Europe we insist on" (*"L'Europe que nous exigeons"*).

Brikena Xhomaqi (Life-long Learning Platform) requested that the date be decided on as soon as possible to avoid conflicts in scheduling. She added that she was in favour of the idea of a "Civil Society Week", with events focusing on certain themes organised by Liaison Group members to provide added value to the discussion. She also agreed that the focus should be on social policy in general.

Conny Reuter briefly commented that the dates being envisaged were 26-27 June 2017.

Mr Kucharczyk (AGE Platform Europe) spoke about how to reconnect Europe with Europeans, as even members of his organisation were not in agreement about further and deeper integration and solidarity at the European level. He supported a more general, cross-cutting theme, focusing on economic and social cohesion.

Assya Kavrakova (ECAS) stated that the tension between economic development and the social dimension was healthy, but she raised a new aspect: the lack of justice at both national and European

levels. In addition, digitalisation ought to be discussed as an opportunity and not just as a threat, along with the digital divide, the role of civic education and media literacy. She concluded by suggesting that the topic of free movement also be discussed, linked to the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

Luk Zelderloo (EASPD) stated that the focus should be very concrete, not abstract. He suggested focussing on legal and financial frameworks to facilitate the work of CSOs, as well as post-2020 for funds and the Juncker package.

Patrice Collignon (International Association Rurality-Environment-Development) suggested the topics of territorial cohesion and the proposed "citizen-proofing" of European legislation (a kind of impact analysis).

David Garcia (UEF) warned against having an approach without specific content ("The Europe we insist on"), as there could be too many ideas going in different directions, but no real conclusion. He announced an event in Rome on 25 March 2017, co-organised with EMI and Young European Federalists.

Gabriella Civico (CEV) requested that the date and topic be decided on as soon as possible. Regarding the topic, she believed the focus should be on implementing solidarity through NGOs and CSOs.

Luca Jahier believed that the proposals put forward should be very specific and that there was strength in the variety brought by the different European Networks of the Liaison Group. The starting point could be the ten priorities of Europeans, as surveyed by the Eurobarometer. On these, the CSOs should make concrete proposals to be prepared in thorough discussions and debates in the national networks of LG members.

George Dassis noted that the theme that appeared to be agreed upon by all was "The Europe we insist on" (L'Europe que nous exigeons). He also acknowledged that a great deal of the discussion was centred on economic, political and social cohesion. He suggested focusing on fewer than 10 points. For example: cohesion (economic, social, territorial) – solidarity – borders – EU political union.

Conny Reuter believed the proposals should be limited in number. He asked for volunteers to get together to define the content of the Civil Society Days. He concluded by proposing that the themes that were not discussed on the Civil Society Days be included in the Liaison Group's work programme.

7. Exchange of views on Liaison Group activities in 2017

The Liaison Group took note of the document outlining its activities for 2017.

8. Decisions on Liaison Group membership (civil society component)

Pierluigi Brombo, head of the Relations with Civil Society and Forward Studies Unit, explained that the changes were meant to broaden participation in the Liaison Group. He stressed that all changes were made with the consent of the organisations concerned and respecting the rules of procedure adopted by the Liaison Group.

The changes were as follows:

- To merge "Family Life" and "Childhood and Children's Rights", creating a new sector named "Family Life, Childhood and Children's Rights". COFACE-Families Europe would be the full member and Eurochild would be an alternate member;
- "Consumers' Policy" sector: the International Union of Tenants (IUT) would be the full member and the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) would become an alternate member, due to their limited time and lack of availability for participating as a full member;
- The addition of the European Students' Union as an alternate member in the "Education and Training" sector;
- The addition of the European Federation for Intercultural Learning as an alternate member in the "Youth" sector; and
- The removal of the Platform for Intercultural Europe from the "Arts and Culture" sector, as the organisation was no longer in existence.

Luca Jahier expressed surprise at the fact that the IUT, a member representing a specific "sub-sector", would be a full member and the BEUC only an alternate member, the latter being more representative of the "Consumers' Policy" sector.

Conny Reuter explained that the BEUC had never attended the meetings: making the IUT a full member ensured representation of the "Consumers' Policy" sector at all meetings of the Liaison Group. BEUC was of course welcome to actively participate in LG meetings and activities, as would be fully allowed by its new status.

All changes were accepted by the Liaison Group.

9. Any other business

N/A

*

* *

APPENDIX

LIAISON GROUP WITH EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

Tuesday, 8 November 2016, at 10.30 a.m.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

• Members of the Liaison Group

EESC representatives

Mr	Pedro ALMEIDA FREIRE	President of the Single Market Observatory
Mr	Krzysztof BALON	Member of the European Economic and Social Committee
Mr	Etele BARATH	President of the Europe 2020 Steering Committee
Ms	Gabriele BISCHOFF	President of GRII
Mr	Brendan BURNS	President of the NAT section
Mr	Georgios DASSIS	EESC President – Co-chair of the Liaison Group
Mr	Luca JAHIER	President of GRIII
Ms	Brenda KING	President of the Sustainable Development Observatory
Mr	Gonçalo LOBO XAVIER	Vice-President of the European Economic and Social Committee
Mr	Martin SIECKER	President of the INT section
Ms	Dilyana SLAVOVA	President of the REX section
Mr	Joost VAN IERSEL	President of the ECO section

Representatives of European civil society organisations and networks

Mr	Christos AVDELLAS	Union of European Federalists
Ms	Gabriella CIVICO	European Volunteer Centre
Ms	Patrice COLLIGNON	Rurality-Environment-Development international association
Mr	David GARCIA	Union of European Federalists
Mr	David GARRAHY	European Youth Forum
Mr	Dominique GUIBERT	European Association for the Defense of Human Rights
Ms	Assya KAVRAKOVA	European Citizen Action Service
Mr	Maciej KUCHARCZYK	The European Older People's Platform
Ms	Lisa MASHINI GAYONGO	Cooperatives Europe
Ms	Maria OREJA-CHANTELOT	European Foundation Centre

Ms	Rosa PEREZ MONCLUS	Culture Action Europe
Mr	Conny REUTER	Co-chair of the Liaison Group
Ms	Barbara STEENBERGEN	International Union of Tenants
Ms	Brikena XHOMAQI	Lifelong Learning Platform
Mr	Luk ZELDERLOO	European Association of Service Providers for persons with Disabilities

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

EESC representatives

Mr	Pierre Jean COULON	President of the TEN section
Mr	Jacek KRAWCZYK	President of GRI
Mr	Michael SMYTH	Vice-President of the European Economic and Social Committee
Ms	Lucie STUDNICNA	President of the CCMI section
Mr	Pavel TRANTINA	President of the SOC section
Mr	Carlos Manuel TRINDADE	President of the Labour Market Observatory

Representatives of European civil society organisations and networks

Mr	Petros FASSOULAS	European Movement International
Mr	Dirk JARRE	EURAG
Ms	Paola PANZERI	COFACE – FAMILIES EUROPE
Mr	Jan Robert SUESSER	European Civic Forum
