



Brussels, 21 December 2017

## **MINUTES**

of the 31st meeting

of the

Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks

held in the Committee building, Brussels

on **29 November 2017**

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The Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks held its 31st meeting in Brussels, at 10.30 a.m. on **Wednesday 29 November**. **Conny Reuter**, co-chair of the Liaison Group, opened the meeting and said a few words about a member of Mr Dassis' cabinet who sadly had passed away. A minute of silence followed.

#### **ATTENDANCE LIST (See Appendix)**

1. **Adoption of the draft agenda**

The agenda was adopted.

2. **Approval of the minutes of the 30th meeting**

The minutes were approved.

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

The Liaison Group co-chair, **Conny Reuter**, chaired the meeting since EESC President George Dassis was absent at the beginning due to the death of a member of his cabinet.

**Conny Reuter** first made a statement referring to: Altena, the knife attack on the city's mayor and the challenges the city had faced with regard to its transition away from industrialisation and the recent migration. The Social Summit in Gothenburg and the importance of balance between the economic development and social cohesion; and the Riga Roadmap on Civil Dialogue explaining that an internal working group was tackling the revision of this useful and still relevant document.

Mr Reuter subsequently described the positive and negative trends in the European Union and underlined that in this context the work done by the EESC and other European networks was important. He called for thoughts on the future and asked what opportunities there are in the 2030 agenda, while mentioning social and territorial cohesion and investment. He concluded his statement by warning that democracy was also under threat in the EU, but that there were positive signs to build on.

**Pierre Jean Coulon, president of the TEN section**, commented on the minutes from the last meeting, and, in particular, the fact that some argued that the Liaison Group did not reflect the composition of civil society. He indicated that he did not agree with this criticism and affirmed his belief that the Liaison Group gives civil society a voice, thus better covering all aspects of it. Secondly, he argued that we should try not to work in silos but work together in a cross-cutting manner, and that, in this regard the Liaison Group was a valuable body.

**Conny Reuter** expressed thanks for the comments and noted that there was always a debate on the Liaison Group's representation of civil society. He recalled that in 2014 the GL had adopted rules on the attendance of meetings and on the consequences that three non-excused non-attendances would

have on membership. He continued by reflecting on working in silos and concluded by arguing that the Liaison Group meetings are indeed important to prevent it.

**Luc Zelderloo, European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities**, said that the EESC organisations are strong in terms of involving civil society and human rights, but not strong enough when it comes to looking at the financial side. Therefore, an event was held on how to better use the financial instruments provided by the EU. He shared the four conclusions reached at the event:

- a need for a dedicated fund for investment in social infrastructure;
- the need for a high level group with strong involvement in the social section that monitors and steers social investment at European level;
- local and national investment platforms which include grassroots-level actors;
- the need to set up data collection, instruments and mechanisms.

He finally stated that the EESC had found allies in the European Investment Bank, the Commission and the Council to work on this.

#### 4. **Liaison Group activities since the last meeting**

**Pierluigi Brombo** reported on the activities of the Liaison Group by going through the freshly published leaflet, mentioning:

- The Civil Society Days as the LG's major event;
- Input and contributions to different aspects of the Committee's work, especially the opinions of particular interest for the Liaison Group's members (Financing of civil society, social rights, Solidarity Corps, etc.);
- The production of two studies. The first on the topic of Social Media Outreach (by ECAS) and the second on the Future Evolution of Civil Society;
- Hearings;
- The Liaison Group's contribution to the EESC's input on the European Commission's work programme;
- Follow-up to the Riga Roadmap with a working-group;
- Co-organisation of expositions and partnerships; and
- The enlargement of the Liaison Group to a new section.

**Conny Reuter** highlighted the importance of the Committees' opinion on financing civil society and on the work on the Social Pillar. He also thanked the secretariat, provided by the Relations with Organised Civil Society and Forward Studies unit, for their support on a daily basis.

**Pavel Trantina, president of the SOC section**, commented and thanked the Liaison Group members for their expert input on opinions and encouraged others to use them too.

**Luca Jahier, president of Group III**, emphasized the importance of the EESC's presence in Goteborg and the activities carried out there, raising a few points. Firstly, he mentioned the scoreboard, a specific instrument to measure and improve the semester exercise. Secondly, he mentioned the new phase in the consultations with social partners on important issues and the

announcement that had been made by **Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament** – i.e. that the social pillar should influence the new multiannual financial framework.

Mr Jahier urged that the Goteborg proclamation not be confined to a library but used in real life. The Liaison Group should be at the forefront of it. He concluded by mentioning a study on the evolution of civil society in the European Union – carried out by Group III together with the CSS unit – which was in its final phase. It was an important exercise in foresight and could be the start of future reflection and work in which the LG would have an important role to play.

**Conny Reuter** agreed and highlighted civil society's role at the Social Pillar Summit. The European Youth Forum and the Social Platform sent two large official delegations to participate in the Social Summit, which allowed the LG to have official speakers on these working groups in Goteborg.

**Martin Siecker, president of the INT section**, responded to the earlier speaker Mr Trantina and agreed regarding using the Liaison Group's expertise, but also noted that rapporteurs usually involve organisations from their own group and that sections do not ask for expertise.

**Conny Reuter** pointed out that the Liaison Group was not an exclusive club, but a group of engaged people, wanting to be the link with the EESC institution and that the expertise in civil society was of course larger than the people in the room.

#### 5. **Update by presidents of sections and other EESC bodies on points of particular interest to the Liaison Group**

**Pedro Almeida Freire, president of the Single Market Observatory (SMO)**, explained what the SMO is about. He presented its focus on the digital single market at the beginning of the semester and underlined that they are now shifting to the single energy market. He continued by explaining the work and cooperation with the Labour Market Observatory.

**Etele Baráth, president of the Europe 2020 Steering Committee**, said that the steering committee was in a difficult situation as it had finished the work that it was asked to do in the 1990s and that now the EESC Presidency might want to change its duties. He explained that the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) and the EU 2020 could pull together in the future to work towards 2030 and 2050. He said that the body also set up a subcommittee on the annual growth survey 2018.

**Conny Reuter** acknowledged the work carried out by the Europe 2020 Steering Committee and stated that Goteborg was the first step in the process of social rights and the inclusion of social scores. He believed that the 2030 agenda might not replace the 2020 agenda, but integrate in it instead.

**Pierre Jean Coulon, president of the TEN section**, briefly informed the Liaison Group of three things:

- the increasingly important role of civil society at the COP meetings on climate change;
- the use of the word "clean", which is not neutral, was increasing; and
- in the legislative packages, citizens were put at the centre of climate action.

He went on by repeating his concerns about the fact that:

- There would be more climate refugees in the future;
- There was an issue with cyber security – which no one was safe from. The EU was creating an agency on the matter but a cross-cutting approach was needed; and
- The future of the EU itself could be at stake.

**Conny Reuter** stated that regarding silo thinking, it was good that the section's presidents meet once a year at the Liaison Group. He concluded by talking about the philosophical issue of artificial intelligence.

**Martin Siecker, president of the INT section**, expressed three priorities the INT section had been working with:

- new economic models and collaborative consumption, with opinions on sharing economy, the nudge concept etc.;
- the promotion of entrepreneurship in all forms, for example, social economy enterprises (permanent study group); and
- Artificial Intelligence, with an own initiative opinion that triggered a debate throughout Europe and in Brazil.

**Dilyana Slavova, president of the REX section**, presented the section's work, divided into two main topics:

- EU Neighbourhood: women in the EUROMED region and the EUROMED Summit conference, and work (opinion, hearings) on the Western Balkans which would be the focus of future EU presidencies; and
- Trade: right now working on opinion on the Trade and Sustainable Development chapters; next year in March/April a big conference would be held, in cooperation with DG Trade, and all LG members would be invited.

**Lucie Studničná, president of the CCMI**, presented the section's work regarding adopted opinions on digitalisation and financial services and the impact of digitalisation on the health industry. She explained the focus for the period ahead: to look at the new industrial policy strategy of Europe and working with the launch of the platform for coal regions. She informed the participants of the CCMI's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

**Pavel Trantina, president of the SOC section**, informed those present that he would continue to involve the Liaison Group members in events, and that in the future the social work pillar would be a focus. He highlighted a few things:

- A mini-hearing on youth related issues on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March;
- On the topic of rule of law, fundamental rights and social inclusion a debate on participatory democracy and the rule of law (to increase the grassroots perspective) would be held; and
- Events and opinions on the rights of disabled people, the inclusion of Roma people, gender equality and anti-radicalisation.

He invited everyone to the European Migration Forum.

**Carlos Manuel Trindade, president of the Labour Market Observatory (LMO)**, presented the key points that the work programme would focus on this term, which were:

- Migration and refugees; and
- Long-term unemployment.

He presented their working method, which was based on conferences and hearings, and noted that the LMO had cooperated with civil society, SOC, the Single Market Observatory, the Sustainable Development Observatory, the support group for Roma and the support group for disabilities. In the long-term the LMO was working on a project on long-term unemployment with Cedefop – on education and training issues.

**Gabriele Bischoff, president of Group II**, presented the key points for the Workers' Group:

- evaluating the five priorities for 2017 and drafting priorities for the next 2.5 years;
- workers all over Europe are concerned about their future and had lost trust and hope in Europe. The EU was not solving the problem. There was a crisis of modern democracy. She continued by saying that the vision of social democracy in Europe had been lost and the focus was on the national level these days;
- digitalisation could be a challenge; and
- she emphasized that everybody needs to work together to overcome these challenges.

**Jacek Krawczyk, president of Group I**, presented the key points of his group's work:

- the opinion on the Pillar of Social Rights;
- the issue of industrial policy, on which he called for the committee's position to be coordinated and not limited to operating in silos;
- the issue of the mobility package and the posting of workers in transport. Group I had submitted a counter opinion on the issue;
- the debate on the future of Europe and the future of the EESC; and
- the issue of the rule of law in many Member States. The civil society perspective was important but there was a glass wall between them and government representatives. He presented examples he had heard from a meeting in Poland.

He asked for financing or a guarantee of independence at European level for some NGOs in Member States, because the third sector was exposed and vulnerable.

## **6. Exchange of views on Liaison Group activities in 2018 and preparations for the Civil Society Days 2018**

**Conny Reuter** noted that the Civil Society Days 2017 had been a success and reminded the key issues for civil society. The next Civil Society Days would take place on the 24 and 25 of May right after the EESC plenary session celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EESC. A new EESC President would also be elected next year.

**Luca Jahier** started by warning of the challenges ahead in 2018 and the key issues concerning the rule of law and democracy. He continued quoting Gabriella Civico, who had mentioned that Europe had discovered its mortality when one member decided to leave. He said 2018 would be the 100 year anniversary of the end of the First World War and that there were historical issues with peace that are back on the table. He listed three priorities:

- having a real discussion which reflects different national positions, so as to avoid limiting itself to the usual European bubble;
- relaunching the issue of who we are and our space; and
- the future of Europe.

**EESC President, Georges Dassis**, joined the meeting and urged that the topics for the Civil Society Days be decided as soon as possible. He gave suggestions on the topics: Financing, Youth and Culture. He thanked the participants for their condolences to the colleague who had passed away. He gave an overview of a conference on the Future of Europe scheduled for 1 and 2 March 2018 in Athens and urged the Liaison Group to invite civil society representatives and to mobilise supporters.

**Vladimir Sestovic, from the European Civic Forum**, discussed the Riga Civil Society Roadmap and activities in Tallinn, notably those on funding CSOs and endowment for democracy.

**Simona Giarratano, European Disability Forum**, stated that the EDF was eager and happy to contribute and argued that civil society financing was needed, along with a focus on youth organizations.

**Barbara Steenbergen, International Union of Tenants**, spoke about the Urban Agenda and called for an analysis of regional policies when meeting with civil society next year. She highlighted the importance of housing issues in light of increasing urbanisation.

**Etele Baráth** presented lessons learnt from a conference in Budapest and argued that getting in touch with young people was important.

**Elisa Briga, European Federation for Intercultural Learning**, thanked participants for accepting the organisation into the Liaison Group. She wanted the Civil Society Days 2018 to focus on youth. She highlighted the fact that the EC had issued a communication on European identity recently.

**Katherine Heid, Culture Action Europe**, welcomed the focus on culture. Looking at the development of a civil society space in certain countries she believed that, "when the canary in the

coal mines stops singing, we have got a problem". She continued on, linking this development to civil society, freedom of expression, culture and populism in Europe.

**Maciej Kucharczyk, AGE Platform Europe and elected vice-president of the Social Platform,** appreciated the earlier intervention by Luca Jahier and his emphasis on cultural heritage. He said that the future would be based upon a heritage of peace and European democracy. He also pointed out that next year was 100 years after the First World War, but looking at Poland and other countries, he was afraid that nationalism was resurfacing in public debates.

**Carlos Manuel Trindade** warned about the rise of populism and emphasized two pillars that have to work together to tackle it:

- economic growth; and
- social development.

**Claude Debrulle, European Association for the defence of Human Rights,** spoke about the event in Athens in May, the Civil Society Days and the elections in the European Parliament. He mentioned a "European Citizenship" and outlined two strategies for Europe: "Strengthening cooperation" and "Moving forward as 27 member states".

**Conny Reuter** rounded up the discussion by talking about culture, identities and the French term "territoire" which means civic, democratic and/or urban space. He said that in December, there would be an informal working group on preparations for the Civil Society Days.

## **7. Presentation of the EESC Conference on the Future of Europe by Georges Dassis and exchange of views on the Liaison Group-CSO's contribution**

As the Conference to take place in Athens was already discussed under point 7, **Georges Dassis** just announced that he would update the Liaison Group as soon as there were more details available on this conference.

## **8. Decisions on Liaison Group membership ([EEB](#) - environmental sector)**

Pierluigi Brombo presented the proposal made by the two chairs of the LG to have a new *Environment* sector and to include the EEB as a new CSO member of the Liaison Group. There were no objections to them joining and therefore the decision was formally adopted.

## **9. Short presentation of the EESC [study on EU consultation in a digital age](#) by ECAS**

Due to a lack of time, **Elisa Lironi, ECAS,** presented the study briefly, highlighting that consultations were one of the few tools citizens can use and mentioned the three main problems with consultations:

- accessibility;
- representativeness; and
- feedback mechanisms on the final impact.

She had conducted a survey with the EESC members on how they use today's technology to reach out to members in their organisations and participate in democracy. She presented some general policy recommendations found in the study.

## **11. Civil society initiatives at European level**

**Conny Reuter** thanked ECAS and Ms Lironi and linked the study to the issue of democracy and the positive aspects of digitalisation, which had been discussed at the meeting. He concluded by mentioning that the French Minister of European Affairs would come to Brussels to discuss the civil/citizens dialogue issue.

An exchange of views on the democratic conventions launched by French President Macron had to be skipped due to the lack of time.

Mr Reuter thanked everyone for participating in this meeting.

## **12. Any other business**

N/A

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## APPENDIX

### LIAISON GROUP WITH EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

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Tuesday 29 November 2017 at 10.00 a.m., room JDE 63

#### ALPHABETICAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

##### **EESC Members who have confirmed their presence:**

Mr	Pedro ALMEIDA FREIRE	President of the Single Market Observatory
Mr	Etele BARATH	President of the Europe 2020 Steering Committee
Ms	Gabriele BISCHOFF	President of GRII
Mr	Pierre Jean COULON	President of the TEN section
Mr	Georges DASSIS	President of the European Economic and Social Committee
Mr	Luca JAHIER	President of GRIII
Mr	Jacek KRAWCZYK	President of GRI of the European Economic and Social Committee
Mr	Martin SIECKER	President of the INT section
Ms	Dilyana SLAVOVA	President of the REX section
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

##### **Members of Civil Society organisations who have confirmed their presence:**

Ms	Oonagh AITKEN	Volonteuropé
Mr	Aurélien BERTHELOT	Ruralité-Environnement-Développement
Ms	Elisa BRIGA	Lifelong Learning Platform
Ms	Gabriela CIVICO	European Volunteer Centre
Mr	Claude DEBRULLE	European Association for the Defence of Human Rights
Mr	David GARRAHY	European Youth Forum
Ms	Simona GIARRATANO	European Disability Forum
Ms	Katherine HEID	Culture Action Europe
Ms	Elisa LIRONI	European Citizen Action Service
Mr	Conny REUTER	Co-chair of the EESC Liaison Group with civil society organizations and networks
Mr	Vladimir SESTOVIC	European Civic Forum
Ms	Barbara STEENBERGEN	International Union of Tenants (IUT)
Mr	Maciej KUCHARCZYK	The European Older People's Platform
Mr	Jeremy WATES	European Environmental Bureau

Ms Andrea WITT EUROCHILD  
Mr Luk ZELDERLOO European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities

**EESC Members who have sent their apologies:**

Mr Brendan BURNS President of the NAT section  
Ms Brenda KING President of the Sustainable Development Observatory  
Mr Gonçalo LOBO XAVIER Vice-President of the European Economic and Social Committee  
Mr Michael SMYTH Vice-President of the European Economic and Social Committee  
Mr Joost VAN IERSEL President of the ECO section

**Members of Civil Society organisations who have sent their apologies:**

Mr Dirk JARRE The European Older People's Platform  
Ms Emma KLEVER European Movement International  
Ms Annica RYNGBECK Social Platform  
Mr Piotr SADOWSKI Volunteering Matters  
Ms Marilena VRANA European Foundation Centre  
Ms Brikena XHOMAQI Lifelong Learning Platform

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