



Brussels, 5 July 2018

## **MINUTES**

of the 32nd meeting

of the

Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks

held in the Committee building, Brussels

on **26 June 2018**

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The Liaison Group with European civil society organisations and networks held its 32nd meeting in Brussels, at 10 a.m. on Tuesday 26 June 2018.

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

1. **Adoption of the draft agenda**

The agenda was adopted.

2. **Approval of the minutes of the 31st meeting**

The minutes were approved.

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

**Luca Jahier** opened the meeting by welcoming the EESC members who had recently joined the Liaison Group: Christa Schweng, Ariane Rodert, Arno Metzler and Stefano Palmieri. Violeta Jelić and Maurizio Reale unfortunately could not attend the meeting, but he welcomed them as well. He then recalled some of the vital features and background of the Liaison Group, established in 2004 and reformed in 2014. The work done in the Liaison Group had evolved significantly since 2004-2005. Some tangible and constructive exchanges of views had allowed European civil society networks to understand the potential and the institutional role of the EESC. Therefore, it was in the interest of the Committee to pursue this cooperation further.

Mr Jahier recalled the motto for his presidency – *rEUnaissance* – and pointed out the need for renewal and progress in social, human and environmental dimensions. Culture and youth were two crucial parts of his programme. He referred to the recent 60th anniversary of the EESC and the mission of the EESC. In conclusion, the EESC President underlined that the forthcoming year was going to be crucial, and that the EESC and civil society organisations should encourage participation in the European Parliament elections.

The floor was then given to the co-chair, **Conny Reuter**. Mr Reuter underlined the fact that the Liaison Group worked in complementarity with the EESC, bringing a specific European dimension, thanks to the fact that it was composed not of national delegations but of European civil society networks. He then addressed the question of the duplication of work and the multiplication of structures, and advocated for the Liaison Group to have a clear purpose and role.

He subsequently touched on the key challenges in Europe today, which were linked to the question of how to manage diversity at cultural, economic and political levels, the importance of sustainability, and the upcoming European elections. In his view, civil society organisations should find a way to mobilise citizens beyond manifestos and to regain leadership in the public debate on crucial topics. He addressed the importance of the debate surrounding the next multiannual financial framework and the need to reaffirm mutual respect and faith in institutions. A reflection on the state of the European Union from the point of view of the EESC and of civil society was also needed.

Finally, he suggested organising the next Civil Society Days in June 2019, after the elections to the EP, using this window of opportunity to present recommendations and lobby the next Parliament directly.

#### 4. **Civil Society Days 2018 and Liaison Group activities since the last meeting**

**Conny Reuter** thanked the incoming President, Luca Jahier, for the suggestion to combine the 60th anniversary of the EESC and the Civil Society Days, which had tackled the topic of digitalisation and its impact on our societies. He pointed out the good preparation done by the civil society component of the Liaison Group and the cooperation among different EESC sections, with the TEN, INT and SOC sections actively participating. There had also been good participation by institutional representatives.

The recommendations drafted by the participants would be presented to the European Commission and to the Digital Agenda Intergroup of the European Parliament.

**Pierre Jean Coulon, President of the TEN Section**, praised a number of positive and innovative points relating to the Civil Society Days: intensive cooperation between EESC sections and civil society organisations; a good opportunity to speak about fundamental rights and digitalisation; and the need to tackle cross-cutting issues in partnership, as was done this year and would be repeated in the next edition. He called for better coordination with the Liaison Group on topics related to civil society and for greater awareness of the activities of other bodies.

**Ariane Rodert, President of the INT Section**, said that she had been involved in the Liaison Group before becoming an EESC member. She referred to artificial intelligence as a priority for the INT Section and recalled the recently set up temporary study group on this topic. In the field of AI, synergies among different actors were crucial. The TEN, INT and SOC sections were working towards cooperating on a code of ethics for AI. Three EESC opinions on AI would be voted on in September and one more is being prepared by the SOC Section. She concluded by expressing her satisfaction at the cooperation relating to the Civil Society Days.

**Carine Simon, Ruralité-Environnement-Développement (R.E.D.)**, expressed her satisfaction about the outcomes of R.E.D.'s participation in the workshop on the digital divide and pointed out R.E.D.'s willingness to take action before the elections.

**Stefano Palmieri, President of the ECO Section**, affirmed the crucial role of the Liaison Group in improving the participation of civil society organisations and expressed his interest in involving the ECO Section in the next edition of the Civil Society Days. He underlined the importance of the forthcoming year for political developments and saw the road from Sibiu to the elections as a window of opportunity for different groups to converge, give voice to their aspirations, and reaffirm the fundamental values of the European Union. In his view, the Liaison Group had to make a contribution towards the European project, counter anti-European movements, and make the most of this opportunity.

5. **Exchange of views on the Liaison Group's role and on its future activities** in view of the European Parliament election and institutional changes

**Dilyana Slavova, President of the REX Section**, commented on her first contacts with the Liaison Group and regretted the low attendance rate of the CSO members of the Liaison Group at the biannual meeting. She considered the Liaison Group to be a much-needed body, which had the full support of her section, but said that it should become more inclusive, interesting and appealing, including for EESC members that are not part of the Liaison Group. She made several proposals to improve the LG meetings.

**Christa Schweng, President of the SOC Section**, also agreed that choosing a topical issue would help to make the Liaison Group meetings more attractive. She proposed artificial intelligence, the MFF, and the future of work. Working on the code of ethics for AI mentioned by Ms Rodert would also be highly interesting.

**Arno Metzler, President of Group III**, expressed his disappointment at the number of empty seats and made several observations on the purpose of the Liaison Group, raising the question of whether what the Liaison Group offered was still needed. He suggested considering whether the associations which were not present today should be replaced by others.

**Conny Reuter** remarked that the attendance at the meeting did not reflect the real engagement of CSOs in the LG. He recapped the rules of attendance for meetings and the possibility of replacing organisations that were repeatedly absent. He agreed to contact the absent organisations and ask them about their motivation etc. In the past, some associations that did not attend meetings repeatedly were replaced. He advocated for a revision of the meeting format.

**Luca Jahier** underlined several positive results achieved by the LG in the past few years:

- giving greater impact and visibility to civil society organisations;
- creating opportunities for networking among civil society organisations;
- involving different civil society experts in its daily work and including different perspectives in its opinions.

The only possibility for improvement seemed to be in the involvement of the civil society networks in the biannual meetings of the LG. An exchange of views on the EESC's annual work plan was not possible if CSOs did not attend Liaison Group plenary meetings. Therefore, a change in format or in composition was needed and it was important to check the real motivation, wishes and needs of the organisations involved.

**Gabriele Bischoff, President of Group II**, called upon the members of the Liaison Group to face reality and take action before Europe fell apart, instead of focusing on how to make the Liaison Group more appealing. Some Member States were launching initiatives to revive the European project, but they lacked a shared idea and coordination. The Liaison Group could be a good place to move this discussion along.

**Maciej Kucharczyk, AGE Platform**, suggested targeting those NGOs that were outside of the Brussels bubble and did not have easy access to European stakeholders, if the internal rules of the Liaison Group allowed that. He was pleased with the high participation rate during the CivSocDays, the clear outcome and the concrete recommendations and suggested a change regarding the content of the LG meetings.

**Ariane Rodert** advocated enhanced cooperation inside the Liaison Group and suggested reflecting upon the added value of the Liaison Group and raising awareness of the Liaison Group among EESC members. It was important to establish the Liaison Group as a pool of experts for the EESC. Making the Liaison Group more visible and accessible was not a trivial issue, since it could contribute to fostering common European values.

**Rosa Perez, Culture Action Europe**, suggested looking at the overall involvement of European platforms in the Liaison Group, beyond the biannual meetings, and pointed out the high importance of the Civil Society Days for the work and priorities of the NGOs involved.

**Brikena Xhomaqi, Lifelong Learning Platform**, underlined the hard work and energy invested in the Civil Society Days, whose result had been far beyond expectations. She agreed that the Liaison Group should offer something more than the Civil Society Days, and that a reflection on the objectives of the platform was needed.

**Arno Metzler** suggested discussing this issue again in the autumn and proposed taking a more systematic approach to organising the next meeting, such as creating and sharing a questionnaire for the Liaison Group members and reflecting upon what the Liaison Group was offering and making sure that it was not duplicating existing structures.

**Conny Reuter** thanked Rosa Perez, Brikena Xhomaqi and Maciej Kucharczyk for their contributions. While stressing the fact that the Liaison Group was more than its biannual meetings, he recognised the need to change the format of the Liaison Group, and suggested forming a steering group that could follow the work that the whole Liaison Group was carrying out. A questionnaire and also private talks to understand the motivation of Liaison Group members were another important step.

**Luca Jahier** praised the Civil Society Days and the cooperation between NGOs and the EESC on specific topics as very positive elements. In his view, the LG's structure should be changed, but not the body itself. The Liaison Group should serve the purpose of opening a dialogue with European-level civil society organisations, not with national ones. Positioning the next Civil Society Days right after the elections was a good choice to deliver a clear message.

**Marilena Vrana, European Foundation Centre**, underlined that the civil society members of the Liaison Group met far more often than twice per year and said that she would like EESC members to attend the smaller meetings.

**Gabriella Civico** stressed the importance of recognising the additional work done by civil society organisations in interaction with the EESC but outside the Liaison Group. She also observed that few EESC members had been present during the whole of the Civil Society Days, including in the workshops, and she would be interested to know the reason for this low participation rate in order to inform any necessary changes for future editions in order to make the event more attractive for EESC members.

In response to Gabriella Civico, **Luca Jahier** explained that more members than the ones designated had taken part in the Civil Society Days. He also underlined that only the official biannual Liaison Group meetings offered an institutional and structured framework for dialogue between the EESC and European civil society platforms.

**Conny Reuter** summed up the discussion by promising to come up with a questionnaire and some proposals for improvement after the summer break.

6. Exchange of views on the **Action Plan for the implementation of Articles 11(1) and 11(2)** of the Treaty on European Union

No discussion

7. **Renewal of the term of Conny Reuter as co-chair of the Liaison Group**, representing civil society organisations and networks

The term of Conny Reuter as co-chair of the Liaison Group was renewed by acclamation.

8. Decision on the **membership of the Liaison Group** (civil society component, human rights sector): [Front Line Defenders](#)

Pierluigi Brombo briefly presented the organisation, which would become an alternate member for AEDH. Then the members of the Liaison Group adopted a decision whereby Front Line Defenders became a new CSO alternate member of the Liaison Group.

9. **Any other business.**

N/A

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Appendix





## APPENDIX

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

Tuesday 26 June 2018 at 10.00 a.m., room JDE 70

#### ALPHABETICAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

##### **EESC Members present:**

Ms	Gabriele BISCHOFF	President of GRII
Mr	Pierre Jean COULON	President of the TEN section
Mr	Luca JAHIER	President of the EESC
Mr	Arno METZLER	President of GRIII
Mr	Stefano PALMIERI	President of ECO section
Mr	Krzysztof PATER	President of LMO
Ms	Christa SCHWENG	President of SOC section
Ms	Dilyana SLAVOVA	President of the REX section
Ms	Ariane RODERT	President of INT section

##### **Members of Civil Society organisations present:**

Ms	Gabriela CIVICO	European Volunteer Centre
Mr	Maciej KUCHARCZYK	AGE Platform
Ms	Rosa PEREZ	Culture Action Europe
Mr	Conny REUTER	Co-chair of the EESC Liaison Group
Ms	Carine SIMON	Ruralité-Environnement-Développement
Ms	Barbara STEENBERGEN	International Union of Tenants (IUT)
Ms	Marilena VRANA	European Foundation Centre
Mr	Jeremy WATES	European Environmental Bureau
Ms	Brikena XHOMAQI	Lifelong Learning Platform

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

Ms	Violeta JELIC	President of SMO
Mr	Jacek KRAWCZYK	President of GR I
Mr	Maurizio REALE	President of NAT section
Mr	Peter SCHMIDT	President of SDO
Ms	Lucie STUDNIČNÁ	President of the CCMI section

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

Mr	Claude DEBRULLE	European Association for the defense of Human Rights (AEDH)
Mr	Luk ZELDERLOO	European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities