



## Info Workers' Group Groupe des travailleurs

The September session of the EESC plenary has been of particular interest, as some of the most fundamental issues for the future of Europe and its citizens have been discussed:

- The future budget of the European Union for 2021-2027 (the Multiannual Financial Framework or MFF)
- The development of the Pillar of Social Rights with the creation of the European Labour Authority
- The irruption of Artificial Intelligence and its impact on work and workers

The Workers' Group considers that delivering on these issues would be crucial for the future of Europe. A single market cannot function properly if it does not meet the most basic aspiration of its people, which is to have decent working and living conditions. It must work for everyone.

Find below an overview of these and other topics.

### Debate with Günther Oettinger, Commissioner in Charge of the Budget and Human Resources



European Commissioner **Günther Oettinger**, in charge of the budget and human resources, was invited for a debate on the new multiannual financial framework, which outlines the European Union's budget for the period 2021-2027. The members of the Workers' Group expressed their concern about the budget cuts particularly to cohesion policy and the social funds.



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As stated by **Javier Doz Orrit**, rapporteur of the EESC's opinion on the MFF, this was not the time to propose cuts, when poverty and inequality had increased so massively due to the crisis. On the contrary, new own resources should be introduced for the EU to raise revenue. Guaranteeing a strong social dimension is the only way to go forward, and Mr. Doz Orrit pleaded for the establishment of a specific programme to assist Member States in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. **Gabriele Bischoff**, President of the Workers' Group, stressed that those Member States which insisted on these cuts had to be reminded of their responsibility towards their citizens. The challenges Europeans were facing demanded solidarity: nobody should be left behind. The representatives of civil society, irrespective of their backgrounds, had one message to the European institutions: increase the EU budget to provide the EU with the appropriate tools to fulfil its promise to its people for more social policies in the future. **Stefano Palmieri**, President of the EESC's section for economic issues, recalled how the EU had been admired for many years for being a champion of cohesion and inclusiveness. But somewhere down the line, the EU had forgotten these fundamental values and, now, as a result, economic and social divides were opening up between and within Member States and regions. These inequalities, in turn, fed the Eurosceptic arguments of populists. The EU urgently needed a fresh strategic vision to tackle the crisis and, therefore, a suitable accompanying budget focused on upward convergence. **Philip von Brockdorff** pleaded for specific conditions to help more recent Member States consolidate the progress they had achieved so far. He insisted particularly on the fact that guaranteeing the well-being of citizens in all its forms should be an objective on the same level as achieving economic growth.

The plenary session counted also with the participation of the **European Commissioner for mobility and transport, Violeta Bulc**, who presented the Commission's mobility package, a set of initiatives to make traffic safer, encourage smart road charging, reduce air pollution and congestion, cut red-tape for businesses, fight illicit employment and ensure proper jobs and social conditions for workers.

**Pierre Jean Coulon**, President of the EESC's section on transport and energy issues, insisted on the importance of such initiatives that aimed to enhance free movement, one of the fundamental principles of the EU. However, this legislation had to be properly implemented by the Member States if people were to benefit from improved conditions in the transport sector, and relevant stakeholders at the local and regional level had to become aware of this.





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From the Workers' Group, **Andrej Zorko** underlined that if road safety was going to be a top priority, the workers in road transport should not be overlooked. Indeed, they were in desperate need of proper resting times and decent resting infrastructures. He reminded that workers in Eastern Europe had lower salaries, minimum wages paid by the kilometre, and as a result, had to drive as far and as fast as possible for 8 to 10 hours a day. Their position and indeed the position of ALL workers in transport had to be improved in order to enhance road safety.

Opinions approved by the EESC plenary (click on the names to open the opinion page)

SOC/581 – [Access to social protection](#) – Giulia Barbucci



Access to social protection is a fundamental right of every worker and a basic condition for a decent life. This is why, due to the rapidly changing world of work, it is more urgent than ever to address the challenges that the European social protection systems are currently facing with digitalisation, the future of work, demographic change, the energy transition, globalisation. The Workers' Group calls

for concrete and adequate social protection initiatives to be undertaken under the umbrella of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

SOC/587 - [Digital gender gap](#) – Giulia Barbucci

The digital gender divide is an economic, social, societal and cultural issue, to be addressed with comprehensive policies at multiple levels, as it leads to growing gender inequality. Actions must therefore address different fields including the education system from childhood to adulthood, the labour market, work-life balance and public services. The social partners have a key role to play in enhancing gender equality in education and the labour market in order to tackle the digital gender gap.



SOC/580 – [European Labour Authority](#) – Carlos Trindade

Cross-border labour mobility is inevitably on the rise within the EU: between 2010 and 2017 the number of posted workers increased by 68%, the number of people living or working in another Member State rose from 8 to 17 million, and over 2 million transport workers cross intra-EU borders on a daily basis. However, this has also increased cases of unfair



competition, social dumping, and fraud related to tax and social security, for which national labour authorities are ill-prepared. For this reason, the Workers' Group supports the Commission proposal, to ensure workers' rights in cross-border situations. Together with this, the Workers' Group considers civil society's involvement capital: social partners should have a major role in the new European Labour Authority.

INT/845 – [Artificial Intelligence and its impact on the world of work](#) – Franca Salis Madinier



The irruption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is having a profound and rapid impact on our society and the world of work already. However, it requires specific social frameworks in order to be inclusive. These could be built on the European pillar of social rights, for the process to be done with workers, and not against them. The Workers'

Group will closely follow the developments in this sector to ensure that workers' interests are taken into account in all relevant EU policy-making, including the ethical guidelines for AI.





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### SOC/591 – [Protection from carcinogens or mutagens at work](#) – János Weltner

The Workers' Group welcomes this proposal to improve health and safety at work by limiting workers' exposure to new cancer-causing chemicals and particularly the goal to eventually replace substances of high concern with suitable alternative substances or technologies. We also call for EU-wide programmes to develop life-long health surveillance in the framework of national social security or public health systems for all those who have been exposed to such compounds.



### INT/865 – [Supplementary protection certificate for medicinal products](#) – János Weltner

Supplementary Protection Certificates (SPCs) extend the protection of a patent for new medicinal products, compensating the research investment. However, the current legislation puts EU producers of generics and biosimilars (G/B) at a disadvantage, as they are prevented from manufacturing them within the EU until the SPC expires. Meanwhile, extra-EU firms can start ahead and enter the internal market the very day after the certificate has expired. For these reasons, and given the sheer volume of related employment in the G/B sector (over 160,000 jobs), the Workers' Group welcomes the amendment of the related regulation, to eliminate the unintended side-effects of this protection system.

### INT/855 – [Research and Innovation – A Renewed European Agenda](#) – Stefano Palmieri



The Workers' Group welcomes the fact that Research and Innovation continue as a EU priority, including in the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework, and supports the effort to simplify procedures for funding and, particularly, for combination of funds and missions, where the European level can not only provide added value, but also increase research in other regions and Member States, enhancing cohesion

across Europe.





### INT/848 – [Subsidiarity and Gold-Plating](#) – Wolfgang Greif

The term gold-plating, generally, refers to 'overregulation', in this case by the Member States. The Workers' Group rejects the notion, which is ideologically biased, and contradicts the principle of subsidiarity: it is each Member State's prerogative to increase standards, as the EU sets a floor, not a roof, for them. In terms of social, consumer, and environmental policies, upward convergence should



be the goal, rather than a problem. For these reasons, the Workers' Group, while agreeing with the need for less administrative burdens in certain investment schemes, considers that upholding standards and guaranteeing the principle of subsidiarity is of capital importance.

### INT/852 – [Digital Transformation / Health and Care](#) – Thomas Katnig



Digitalisation of healthcare should mean that patients have better care, professionals better working conditions (and time to devote to patients), and the strengthening of social and health services. For the Workers' Group, it is capital to understand it as such, and not as a 'savings package' to get rid of personnel and reduce healthcare quality. Likewise, for the Workers' Group, it is important to assess the risks of data mining and to halt the expropriation of personal stories by companies now. Among other solutions, the development of secure platforms of non-profit type to manage, store, and share digital copies of personal data should be promoted.

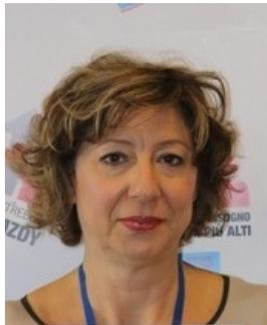


INT/857 – [Insurance against Liability/Motor Vehicles](#) – Christophe Lefèvre

The Workers' Group welcomes the changes regarding insurance, particularly with regards to the protection of victims in the event of insurer bankruptcy, and in general values positively this reform. However, it is a missed opportunity in terms of driverless motor vehicles, which were not taken into the directive despite the comments on the impact assessment.



NAT/732 – [Transparency in Scientific Assessments and Governance of European Food Safety Authority](#) – Esther Vitale



The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is the cornerstone of the European food safety system, from farmer to consumer. From the Workers' Group perspective, transparency is fundamental for it to continue and improve its role watching over one of the safest systems in the world. Particularly relevant is to maintain a high level of independence and optimal internal scientific expertise, transparent and clear communication, and higher levels of civil society involvement in the management structures.





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## TEN/664 – [Initiative Addressing Online Platform Challenges Regarding the spread of Disinformation](#) – Martin Siecker

From Brexit to the victory of Trump in the US, fake news has repeatedly been singled out as a major disruptor of the necessary communication process within democracy. It spreads on social media helped by anonymity, from State and non-State actors alike. From the Workers' Group perspective, it is necessary to consider the possibility of public-private partnerships for online platforms, that can offer affordable services and break existing monopolies, while at the same time providing an alternative for the current free-of-charge services where the user is the product.



## NAT/734 – [Improving the Food Supply Chain](#) – Peter Schmidt



sustainable food supply chain in all aspects.

Reducing unfair trading practices in the food supply chain is important as they create imbalances of power between operators and have negative economic, social and environmental effects. The Workers' Group calls for a ban on all abusive practices and for the regulation of these practices at EU level to protect weaker operators, namely farmers and workers, and to guarantee a



TEN/662 – [Fairness and Transparency for Users of Online Intermediation Services and Search Engines](#) – Marco Vezzani



Although the regulation of online intermediation services is a necessary step to make the digital market fairer and more transparent, the broader legislative framework of this market is still far from complete. The entire e-commerce sector must be regulated to guarantee e-democracy and to make the internet and the digital market safe places that provide equal opportunities for

everyone. We also urge for initiatives to tackle the social dimension of digitalisation by triggering **social dialogue** in the sector.

INT/863 – [Vehicle safety / protection of vulnerable road users](#) – Raymond Hencks

Considering that the number of people killed on EU roads (25 300 in 2017) is still quite high compared to the target the EU has set, the Workers' Group welcomes the tightening of EU legislation on vehicle security but regrets that security systems which are stricter than those required by European legislation are often confined to high-end models. It therefore urges for European standards to be adapted to technological developments as soon as possible.





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ECO/460 – [Multiannual Financial Framework](#) – Javier Doz Orrit



The EU Budget for the years 2021-2027 is set in the so-called Multiannual Financial Framework, which is planned to suffer severe cuts, partially due to Brexit. On this, the Workers' Group disagrees with the areas to be cut, namely Cohesion, Regional Development, the European Social Fund, and the Common Agricultural Policy. Likewise, the stabilisation mechanism for the Euro is too low to prevent or absorb another

crisis, and the investment program (InvestEU) is, at best, maintaining current levels. Therefore, despite positive points such as the increase for Environment and Climate Action or Research, the Workers' Group considers that the proposed budget leaves the EU ill-prepared for the challenges of the next decade, and leaves unattended the social and economic needs of Workers and Citizens, which is likely to increase even more the populist and nationalist movement.

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