The October plenary session welcomed Federica Mogherini, High representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, who presented the main external threats and challenges facing the EU and the priorities of the European External Action Service in this framework. The Workers' Group members praised the active role that Ms Mogherini played on the international scene and her straight messages, and applauded her for recognizing the important role of civil society in shaping foreign policy.

The Workers' Group members focused on issues that were of particular concern to citizens in Europe and globally, including the current unpredictable geopolitical context, globalisation, development cooperation, the rise of nationalism, the attacks against trade union rights.
Gabriele Bischoff, President of the Workers’ Group, stated that for workers, **fair globalisation** was a key priority: "We have to make sure that globalisation delivers for all, not only for the privileged, but really for all". The EU should therefore address the contradictions between its trade and development cooperation policies, which can lead to contradictory results and outcomes. She added that the EU-Africa Partnership for example had to **deliver to the workers of Africa** as much as to the workers of Europe.

The brain drain from Africa to Europe had to be urgently addressed and legal rules for migration developed, "if we do not want to continue seeing people dying in the Mediterranean". In her conclusion, Ms Bischoff stressed that in its efforts to achieve fair globalisation, foreign policy should strive for the **defence and promotion of trade union rights**, especially in countries in which trade unionists still risk their lives when trying to organise the workers.

Mário Soares wondered what the EU's position was, as a leading actor in the fields of **human rights** and sustainable development, with regard to the US initiative concerning binding rules for transnational companies in these areas. He also asked Ms. Mogherini to clarify the **EU's investment strategy in Africa** and the role of Public-Private Partnerships in reinforcing economic and social development on that continent.
The plenary session was also enriched by the presence of Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management. The Commissioner focused his speech on the initiatives currently under way to upgrade the EU's civil protection response in order to respond to disasters more efficiently, in the light of the dramatic impact of climate change which affected the whole of Europe.

Workers' Group member José Antonio Moreno Díaz, who is President of the EESC's fundamental rights and rule of law committee, welcomed the actions mentioned by the Commissioner which were showing how Europe was leading by example. Nevertheless, he referred to the human disaster due to the arrival of migrants in the Mediterranean stressing that "asymmetric solidarity" was not acceptable. This disaster was mainly caused by the fact that Member States had the exclusive competence to deal with refugees. Considering the low number of refugees at the Mediterranean Borders, compared to the size of the EU population, the apparent "political problem" perceived by some was, in reality, the result of manipulative strategies pursued by populist parties. However, the real issue was that the EU allowed Member States to abandon the saving of lives and the management of the humanitarian crisis to civil society and that some of these organisations were even being attacked and insulted by certain governments for doing this.
For these reasons, the EU should use its competences, including on humanitarian aid, in order to fulfil the international directive of saving lives at sea and the Geneva convention, thus showing that solidarity is practised not only abroad, but also in the case of the humanitarian disaster in the Mediterranean.

Giuseppe Iuliano pleaded for the mobilisation of European resources to complement the national civil protection systems. Indeed, he had personal memories from national disasters in which the State had been unable to intervene on time. Instead, civil society organisations had stepped in to provide help with their own – private - resources. The Committee would strongly support a proposal to establish a European civil protection service. After all, the EESC's organisations were already organised in a European network and knew how to get involved on the basis of the principles of solidarity. The European Commission had a huge ally in the European Economic and Social Committee.
SOC 593 - Strengthening Whistleblower Protection at EU Level – Franca Salis Madinier

Whistleblowers are not protected at all in some Member States, often the person denouncing is left defenceless. However, whistleblowing is fundamental for transparency, justice, and proper working conditions. The Workers' Group lays out a blueprint to make it work, particularly if the procedures for the alert mechanism are relaxed and the advisory role of Trade Unions taken into account: this way the legislation can be a real step forward.


Years of crisis and austerity have taken its toll on the workers of Europe: we cannot expect different results if we keep doing the same. The economic policy of the euro area should promote public and private investment, facilitate business financing and innovation, create jobs, improve wages, and reduce job insecurity, poverty and inequality. The Workers' Group is in favour of a positive fiscal instance, to overcome the investment deficit, and calls for a renewed impulse to the EMU reform, to face upcoming crises.
The Workers' Group is concerned about the revision of the ESF, as this proposed ESF+ supposes effectively a 6% reduction in the overall funding for the programme. The proposal could be improved by ensuring no cuts on the budget and involving civil society in the process. Together with this, the Workers' Group proposes in this opinion that 30% of all resources for economic, social, and territorial cohesion should be allocated to the ESF+, and that 30% of the ESF+ resources should be earmarked for social inclusion, to provide the European Pillar of Social Rights with resources.

There will be no life, no jobs and no business on a dead planet. This is an obvious, yet often overlooked fact, particularly when it comes to trade, finances or investment. That is the reason why, from the Workers' Group, we believe that environmental and social sustainability should be a top cross-cutting priority for the European Union: 40% of the budget should be allocated to the climate objective, and social and environmental clauses in each trade agreement should be completed with a binding commitment to the Paris Agreement.
INT 841 - Package on European Company Law – Norbert Kluge

Tax fraud and letterbox companies are a common feature of current cross-border mobility for business. This reform is welcomed as a step towards socially and environmentally sustainable companies, but from the Workers' Group perspective, it should deal with social inclusion and the Pillar of Social Rights as well, to prevent business mobility from being detrimental to workers' rights in Europe.

This plenary session was exceptional by the number of opinions adopted. Other really interesting ones approved focus on the Customs Program, the European Space Program and Aerospace Industry, Single Use Plastics, Education, EU Youth, Erasmus, Asylum and Migration, EU Regulation for Regional Development Funds, Time Zone Changes, and more.

Please click on the link to find more about these topics.

SOC 601 - Internal Security Fund – José Antonio Moreno Díaz

ECO 473 - European Investment Stabilisation Function - Philip Von Brockdorff

INT 861 - European Space Program - Raymond Hencks
SOC 600 - Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF) and Integrated Border Management Fund - Giuseppe Iuliano

TEN 666 - Sustainable Mobility for Europe - Giulia Barbucci

TEN 667 - Road Infrastructure Safety Management – Bryan Curtis

TEN 669 - Implementation of the TEN-T Projects Dimitru Fornea

TEN 677 - Digital Europe Programme– Norbert Kluge

ECO 468 - Review of EU excise duties – Jack O’Connor

CCMI 158 - Challenges and Industrial Change in the EU Aerospace Sector - Enrico Gibellieri

SOC 588 - Education package – Tatjana Babrauskienė

SOC 602 - Erasmus – Tatjana Babrauskienė
ECO 462 - European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund post 2020 – Ester Vitale

INT 860 - Customs Programme – Laure Batut

INT 859 - Single Market Programme – Oliver Röpke

SOC 589 - Next EU Youth Strategy – Adam Rogalewski

CCMI 161 - Industrial Policy towards 2030 – Gerald Kreuzer

NAT 742 - Single Use Plastics – María Nikolopoulou

TEN 685 - Discontinuing seasonal changes of time – María Nikolopoulou
Is the EU finally on a path towards a social Europe?

Hearing in St. Pölten on the European Pillar of Social Rights

In cooperation with the EESC and the Lower Austria Chamber of Labour, a discussion was organised on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at the Arbeitnehmer/innenzentrum in St Pölten. MEP Evelyn Regner, Egbert Holthuis, Head of Unit at DG Employment, and representatives from social partner organisations and regional policy led a debate on this topic in which about 80 guests took part. Gabriele Bischoff and Jukka Ahtela participated in the discussion as EESC representatives.

In her keynote speech, Ms Bischoff stressed the following: "With the Gothenburg Declaration a year ago, the Member States and the EU institutions committed to putting an end to social fragmentation and social dumping in Europe. The Pillar was adopted with the aim to promote equal opportunities and access to the labour market, ensure fair working conditions and guarantee social protection and inclusion for all. Time is running out. With respect to Brexit, Trump and the resurgence of the right-wing populists and nationalists in many European countries, a positive European project is long overdue".

Markus Wieser, President of the Lower Austria Chamber of Labour, said: "The Chamber of Labour and the Trade Union stand firmly by their position: we will not abandon our workers. This Labour Authority must be urgently established. Besides, the EU cannot be there only for the economic lobbyists, it must be there also for the workers."