



Evelyn Regner: the liberal professions are an essential part of our society

On 10 May, the vice-president of the European Parliament Evelyn Regner took part in the [European Day of the Liberal Professions 2022](#), which was hosted by the [Liberal Professions Category](#) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). She spoke during the opening session of the annual conference, which focused on the topic of *Liberal Professions: Lessons Learned and Challenges ahead*. Various civil society and other institutional representatives participated in the event.

In her introductory statement, **Ms Regner** stated that the "Liberal professions contribute positively and are an essential part of our society. They plan and build our houses, they take care of us when we are sick and they protect our democracy through their investigative work." Moreover, she underlined the timeliness of the discussion about the future of work for the liberal professions: "As many liberal professionals were suffering great economic losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to take stock and find solutions to be more resilient to future crises." In this context, Ms Regner stressed the importance of participatory democracy, in particular the role of the EESC and its liberal professions representatives.

Keynote speaker **Julia Told**, professor of civil and corporate law at Vienna University of Economics and Business, also spoke about the impact of the pandemic and the related legislation on the liberal professions. In terms of the increased digitalisation of services, Ms Told was reasonably optimistic and saw opportunities: "It is possible that clients got used to online interactions and building trust in an online environment. There might be potential to increase the market." In addition, she said that the professions expected legal certainty, clear measures in good time, and tailored and quick financial aid, if necessary, in crisis situations such as the pandemic.

Several participants highlighted that professionals have done their utmost to update and reorganise their services and to contribute to the response to the pandemic. Transition processes that have been accelerated by the pandemic need to be supported by specific funding.

With regard to other challenges such as gender equality in the liberal professions, **Evelyn Regner** stressed the need to adapt STEM jobs to workers' needs, for instance in terms of working hours. This could also help attract more women. Political and legal solutions and a mental shift were needed, including the creation of a common level playing field at EU level. Ms Regner concluded: "A common European definition of the liberal professions could be helpful to find a good balance between unification and national requirements at European level. The European labour policy must ensure both minimum standards and safeguards for the liberal professions."

Professor **Giuseppe Colavitti** from the University of L'Aquila and LUISS, University of Rome, proposed that the European Commission base a European definition of the liberal professions on the [Rome manifesto](#). He also stressed the need for the professions to provide independent services solely in the interest of the client. This is of particular importance in the context of digitalisation of services.

For **Anna Maria Bardone**, President of the Italian Industrial Property Consultants Institute, there are three issues to focus on: the digital revolution, geopolitical changes and demographic developments,

which give rise to threats and new opportunities. The combined effect of these three factors must be studied to assess how to facilitate the development of the professions, both for professionals and for the businesses with which they work.

Friedemann Schmidt, President of the Federal Association of Liberal Professions in Germany, addressed the question of how to secure trust in liberal professionals in digital environments. He said, "The 'human factor' is at the core of professional services and therefore it is necessary to state that in the field of artificial intelligence the final decision must rest with people."

In this context, participants stressed the need to update ethical standards for professionals and service providers and to monitor ethical behaviour in the context of digitalisation. A negative impact on jobs and services should be avoided and, with a view to providing cross-border services, it is necessary to uphold quality standards and to avoid a race to the bottom in terms of prices. Emerging digital platforms should develop – not hamper – professional services.

Blaženka Mičević from the Council of European Geodetic Surveyors (CLGE) and AGRODET Ltd. presented the CLGE's *Women in Surveying* project, which addresses the question of how to encourage more women into STEM professions and how to make them successful in their careers. Ms Mičević explained: "The vision of the project is to change the surveying sector and the perspective of women in surveying through education, entrepreneurship and empowerment of women."

Discussions also addressed challenges such as the lack of young professionals and education. **Thomas Kearns** from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) highlighted the need for continuous professional development (CPD): "Investment in CPD is fundamental, however, it is critical that this investment is linked to policy and is evaluated in terms of outcomes and value for money."

Sabrina Diamanti, President of the Italian Council of the National Order of Agronomists and Forestry Doctors, stressed the idea of a deep connection between training, ethics and personal skills, and stated that the role of professionals in the field of sustainable development must be promoted in public administrations, universities and training centres. Networking is essential when it comes to sustainability.

The two spokespeople for the EESC Liberal Professions Category believed that society's aim of making communities more resilient, equitable, productive, sustainable and socially just would depend in many areas on high-quality liberal professional work. This view was supported by several participants.

Category co-spokesperson **Rudolf Kolbe** said: "Due to the crucial role of liberal professions in overcoming societal challenges, we should take up the discussion about a new role for liberal professions' chambers in national and European policy-making and fully implementing them as social partners at national and European level. We also have to discuss new and innovative approaches to defining public interest as regards the EU legal framework."

Category co-spokesperson **Marina Elvira Calderone** concluded the conference by highlighting the role of legislation, education, training and interdisciplinary cooperation in tackling current challenges for the professions. She argued, "States need to support all processes for setting up professions, with legislation taking on board the specific aspects of the professions which will influence the social and economic development of our countries." Legislators need to adapt the regulatory framework to new tools and needs.

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The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process.