



Dir. C – Legislative Work
Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

Preamble

The European elections in 2024 and a new European Commission term of office are setting the priorities for our work in 2023-2025. As the section responsible for the single market, production and consumption, our focus will be on competitiveness and sustainability, on better regulation and on shaping the green and digital transitions. We will pursue our role as the voice of social partners and civil society in advocating the effective implementation and enforcement of regulations and policies related to the single market.

We will work closely with all the other EU institutions, gathering and voicing the views of businesses, social partners and civil society vis-à-vis in particular the European Parliament's ITRE and IMCO Committees, the European Commission's DG GROW, DG COMP, DG CNECT, DG RTD and DG JUST and the EU Council presidencies. We will also work closely with the other EESC sections and the CCMI and promote the work of our Observatory of the Digital Transition and the Single Market and our Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform.

Thematic priorities

1. For a digital and green single market

The year 2023 marks the **30th anniversary of the single market**, a crucial element in ensuring the European Union's economic prosperity. But it still has major flaws. We must continue to address the obstacles that businesses, especially SMEs, face in the single market to ensure a level playing field and foster economic growth.

Looking forward, the **digital and green transitions** must be at the forefront of our efforts, including ensuring a regulatory framework that removes barriers to online transactions, data processing and transfers, while protecting privacy and personal data, as well as ensuring fairness in the digital environment and promoting digital literacy and skills training.

The European Commission has launched numerous initiatives aimed at **regulating digital markets**. As we move forward, it is essential that these initiatives are effectively implemented and enforced. The INT section will closely monitor these developments and provide input from civil society's perspective to our institutional counterparts. We must ensure that these regulations are **enforced** in a way that benefits all stakeholders, including small businesses and consumers.

The EESC was one of the first EU institutions to tackle the topic of **artificial intelligence** (AI), addressing related challenges and opportunities. As AI continues to evolve and reshape our society, it is important that we ensure that it is developed and used in a responsible and ethical manner. The European Parliament and the Council are entering into negotiations on the first ever legislation on AI, and the INT section will closely monitor the outcome of these negotiations and any enforcement-related activities to be presented by the next European Commission. It will also be important to keep an eye on the development of generative AI, such as ChatGPT, which has the potential to revolutionise the way we interact with technology and each other. We must ensure that AI is aligned with our values and goals, with a **human-in-command approach**, and benefits everyone in our society.

The INT section will also continue to be strongly involved in the work of the **European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP)**, which it created together with the NAT section and the European Commission. The platform will continue to bring to the attention of policymakers the challenges and opportunities identified by the circular economy community regarding topics of high importance on the political agenda for the green transition.

2. Competitiveness, sustainable industrial policy and open strategic autonomy

The **competitiveness of European industry** will remain a major topic for the INT section in the coming years. Recent initiatives to support national industries in different parts of the world, like the Inflation Reduction Act in the US, have raised many concerns in the EU. The EU must respond by strengthening its single market, promoting and maintaining a competitive industrial base, and financing the transition towards a sustainable carbon-neutral industry, and must guarantee access to resources, raw materials and affordable fossil-free energy. It is also crucial to consider the **interests of workers** in this equation. The transition will have significant impacts on jobs and employment opportunities, and on economic and social cohesion at Member State and regional levels. The INT section will appropriately follow up on its opinions on the EU industrial strategy and the competitiveness of EU industry and will also prepare its contribution for the new European Commission.

The concept of **open strategic autonomy** has become a central feature of industrial policy. The EESC aims to be involved in drawing up any future proposals in this area through its exploratory opinions, which can be requested by the European Commission. This work will require cooperation with other sections and the CCMI as the topic covers aspects such as industry, but also defence and energy. The Spanish Presidency of the Council will also pay special attention to foresight and strategic autonomy as key elements for adding resiliency to the EU's long-term objectives of a greener, more digital and social Europe. The EESC will voice civil society's perspective on this issue.

Strategic foresight plays an important role in enabling informed political decision-making, in making administrations fit to respond swiftly to various scenarios, and in enabling them to be prepared and equipped for irregular events. The INT section will make use of and contribute to the strategic foresight work of other EU and global organisations.

Research and innovation and the development of EU standards are key drivers of industrial transformation, ensuring that the EU remains globally competitive and can effectively tackle societal

challenges. In this regard, the INT section will follow up on the opinion *A New European Innovation Agenda* and explore opportunities for collaboration with the Committee of the Regions, which is heavily involved in this area. The INT section will maintain its participation in the Commission's Innovation Friendly Regulations Advisory Group, which will enable us to contribute to the formulation of policies and regulations that affect both innovation and consumer protection. In order to maintain our visibility and credibility, it is crucial to continue to monitor developments in this area.

3. Socially and environmentally responsible businesses

Entrepreneurship in all its forms and in all sectors of activity (e.g. in tourism, industry, the platform economy, the social economy and the liberal professions) is essential for economic growth, innovation, employment and social inclusion. It is therefore important to identify and respond to the difficulties SMEs face when accessing the single market. A large majority of SMEs are struggling with the repercussions of the war in Ukraine and this needs to be taken into consideration when developing new policies. We will contribute the expertise of our stakeholders to the upcoming work on the **SME Relief Package** and the **revision of the Late Payment Directive**.

Business transfers are a key element in the recovery of SMEs. That is why we will put business transfers back on the EU agenda, including efforts to support business transfers through awareness-raising activities and by enabling business and other support organisations to promote and assist SME transfers, as well as promoting entrepreneurship among young people. The EESC worked on this topic in its opinion INT/982 on *Business transfers as promoters of sustainable recovery growth in the SME sector* and is **pushing for an EU proposal in this area** jointly with the European Parliament's SME Intergroup.

The form of entrepreneurship that the EESC pays particular attention to is **social economy enterprises**. For years, the EESC has played an increasingly important role at interinstitutional level in promoting this form of entrepreneurship and in monitoring its development. The adoption of the Social Economy Action Plan in December 2021 is a great achievement, and the section will closely monitor its implementation. The upcoming Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions will play a key role in this regard. The INT section will also cooperate closely with the Belgian Presidency, which will place significant emphasis on this topic.

The **liberal professions** are of significant importance to the economic and social development of the EU. It is crucial to give careful consideration to these professions, as they account for 22% of the total workforce in Europe.

The **retail sector** deserves specific attention as it very much depends on the free movement of goods and services around Europe and the world. Excessive regulation and fragmentation of the single market by suppliers hampers the sector's competitiveness. Consumers and businesses are increasingly looking for sustainable products, and the retail sector is leading this transformation and responding to customers' sustainability expectations. For these reasons, a European Pact for Commerce is needed.

Finally, innovation in sustainable economic models is an opportunity for the European Union to become a leader in the development of a form of economic governance that makes economic prosperity inseparable from sustainability.

4. A modern and responsible consumer policy

The single market has made it easier for consumers and businesses to engage in cross-border transactions, both online and offline, but this requires trust and confidence in the market, targeted legislation and effective enforcement. With the ongoing digital transformation, it is crucial to ensure that consumer protection remains a top priority for the EU. The INT section will continue to work towards ensuring that consumers have the necessary **rights and protections, both online and offline**.

One key aspect of this work is following up on important opinions related to the **right to repair** and **green claims**, as well as responding to the request from the Spanish Presidency regarding **advertising through influencers**.

In addition, the INT section will contribute to the next Commission work programme, ensuring that consumer protection remains a key priority. This includes working with the Commission on **enforcement activities** and promoting **online fairness**, so that what is fair offline is also fair online.

Consumer education and information are important tools for promoting responsible consumption and giving consumers access to the necessary information to make informed choices, including information on product origin and environmental impact. The annual **European Consumer Day**, organised by the INT section in cooperation with the Commission and the presidencies of the Council, is an important platform enabling consumers to come together and influence EU policy.

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INDICATIVE LIST OF INITIATIVES UNDER THE FOUR THEMATIC PRIORITIES ENVISAGED DURING THE 2023-2025 HALF-TERM OF OFFICE

1. For a digital and green single market

- *Promoting the exploratory opinion from the Swedish Presidency INT/1011 The Single Market at 30 – how to further improve the functioning of the Single Market*
- *Promoting own-initiative opinion INT/1019 on the deepening of the single market through digitalisation*
- *Drafting the EESC opinion on the 2023 Strategic Foresight Report*
- *Drawing up the EESC evaluation report on the mid-term review of the Digital Europe Programme*

- *Monitoring enforcement of recent initiatives in the digital single market (Digital Markets Act, Digital Services Act) and initiatives under negotiation (AI Act, Data Act)*
- *Organising debates or seminars related to the digital economy and society, with a focus on AI, data and emerging technologies, particularly in the context of the work of the Observatory for the Single Market and Digital Transition, and participation in events on these topics*
- *Follow the work of the Fit for Future (F4F) Platform, where the EESC is represented by three members*
- *Organising public events on the circular economy, such as webinars (e.g. #EU Circular Talks) on specific subjects covered by the various leadership groups and ECESP annual conferences*
- *Managing and promoting the study project "Europe's Circular Economy and its Pact for Skills: working together for an inclusive and job-rich transition"*
- *Organising an event on innovation with the possible involvement of the Committee of the Regions, linked to the follow-up of opinion INT/996 A New European Innovation Agenda*

2. Competitiveness, sustainable industrial policy and open strategic autonomy

- *Promoting opinions INT/1027 on the Green Deal Industrial Plan and the Net Zero Industry Act, INT/1028 on a long-term competitiveness strategy, own-initiative opinion INT/1021 For a resilient, sustainable and responsible European Union supply chain, and the exploratory opinion from the Spanish Presidency INT/1033 Competitiveness and Industry*
- *Drafting the EESC's annual opinion on the competition report*
- *Organising an event related to the Green Deal Industrial Plan and net-zero industry, contributing to the work programme of the new European Commission*
- *Following up with the Commission on the creation of a Net-Zero Europe Platform and possible involvement of the EESC*
- *Calling for an ambitious agenda on European open strategic autonomy, and cooperating with the Council presidencies*
- *Actively participating in the Industry Days organised by the Commission in October 2023 and in the following year (yearly initiative)*
- *Participating in the Industrial Forum set up by the Commission (one EESC member)*
- *Organising an event on innovation with the possible involvement of the Committee of the Regions, linked to the follow-up of opinion INT/996 A New European Innovation Agenda*

3. Socially and environmentally responsible businesses

- *Promoting own-initiative opinion INT/1020 on Modern Business Responsibility/MSMEs*
- *Drafting the EESC opinion on the revision of the Late Payment Directive (as part of INT/1024 on Strengthening MSMEs' financial resilience)*
- *Drawing up the EESC opinion on the Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions*
- *Advocating the importance of business transfers and requesting a Commission proposal on the topic*
- *Supporting the EESC's active involvement in the 2023 edition of the SME Assembly in Bilbao and organising the very first workshop dedicated to social economy enterprises.*

- *Supporting the EESC's active involvement in the Social Economy Congress organised by the Spanish Presidency of the Council in San Sebastian (November 2023)*
- *Supporting the EESC's active involvement in the social economy event organised by the Belgian Presidency of the Council (spring 2024)*
- *Participating in the work of the Commission Expert Group on the Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES)*
- *Organising events with strategic partners (including the European Parliament, the Commission and associations in the Member States) in order to strengthen the role of the EESC in these areas*
- *Organising initiatives (dedicated event or own-initiative opinion) on the liberal professions as a follow-up to opinion INT/904 on Liberal Professions 4.0*

4. A modern and responsible consumer policy

- *Promoting opinions INT/969 on Green Claims and INT/1015 on The right to repair*
- *Promoting the exploratory opinion from the Spanish Presidency INT/1026 on Advertising through influencers*
- *Drafting the EESC opinion on the consumer enforcement package and the revision of the Package Travel Directive*
- *Preparing the EESC's contribution to the work programme of the next European Commission, particularly on topics such as the enforcement and visibility of EU legislation and the impact of digitalisation on vulnerable consumers*
- *Organising annual European Consumer Days, in cooperation with the European Commission and the presidencies of the Council*
- *Organising consumer policy events (possibly in cooperation with the European Parliament, the European Commission and/or other strategic partners)*