



European Economic  
and Social Committee  
Dir. C - Legislative Work

Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

## INT priority themes

### Preamble

The COVID-19 crisis, one of the worst in history, represents a public health emergency, a serious threat to the economy and society, and a risk to democratic institutions. The unprecedented impact of the health crisis calls for an unprecedented and unequivocal solidarity response in the long term.

Paradoxically, this global health crisis can also provide an opportunity to rethink our economy, how we live, and how we consume.

The EESC should primarily focus all efforts on how best to manage crises and learn from them. The significant challenges of recovery in a post-pandemic world require our full attention. Resilient, sustainable and inclusive European responses must be delivered without delay. The Green Deal measures are therefore more relevant than ever.

In this context, the role of the INT Section, which deals with the **single market, production and consumption**, is crucial.

Our work and initiatives must focus on inclusive and green growth, a social economy with its potential unleashed, support for the development of SMEs and a digital transformation that leaves no one behind!

The EESC must therefore emphasise the need for a holistic approach that takes into account the Sustainable Development Goals and the impact of digitalisation on the single market for businesses, workers and consumers, in order to ensure fair working conditions and appropriate social protection. In this context, fight against poverty must be always in EESC's works.

### Thematic priorities

#### 1. For a Digital and Green Single Market

The completion and proper functioning of the European single market remain the guiding principle of the activities carried out within the INT Section, which bears its name. However, the completion of the single market must now also consider new realities affecting people and businesses. We are

starting a digital decade, with profound changes taking place in the coming years, and we will be part of it.

On the one hand, we can no longer speak of a single market without talking about the **digital transition**. The European single market is a digital market! This extensive digital market, a priority for the Commission, stimulates the economy and improves quality of life for our citizens. However, these developments require a European regulatory framework that ensures the removal of barriers to online transactions, while ensuring the protection of privacy and personal data and ensuring cybersecurity. The digital single market has the potential to improve access to information, to bring efficiency gains in terms of reduced transaction costs, less material consumption and reduced environmental footprint, and to introduce improved business and administrative models.

At the same time, we must remain alert to the shifts in technological developments, combat exclusion and limit the EU's dependence on digital giants. The Digital Single Market must leave no one behind and that means, on the one hand, better accessibility, understanding and use of digital tools and on the other hand, improving skills and training in digital technologies.

Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN General Assembly, and more recently the European Green Deal, raise many key challenges, such as tackling social inequalities, **the transition to a low-carbon, nature-friendly, resource-efficient economy**, capable of tackling the effects of climate change, as well as democratic participation and empowerment of civil society.

Another aspect that also needs attention is how the EU legislates ("better regulation") and the need to have a European body of legislation better prepared to serve citizens and businesses. The EU legislative process needs to be more transparent, more open to input from stakeholders and easier to understand.

Finally, the INT Section cannot ignore, and must follow with great attention, the latest developments regarding Brexit, the consequences of which will inevitably affect the European single market.

***Envisaged initiatives:***

- *Preparing EESC opinions on data governance and the digital objectives for 2030*
- *Preparing EESC opinions on the European data space and on Digital visa procedures (both possibly together with SOC section),*
- *Cooperate with SOC section in preparing the opinions on the Package «digital judicial cooperation» and on A trusted and secure European ID,*
- *Organisation of debates or seminars on the digital economy and society, particularly in the context of the work of the Digital Transition Observatory, 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 debates on the effects of Brexit on the single market.*

## 2. Socially and environmentally responsible enterprises

Entrepreneurship in all its forms and in all sectors (including tourism, industry, the platform economy, the social economy) 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. Surprisingly, the Commission Work Programme for 2021 does not appear to foresee specific measures for SMEs, although they are among the most highly affected by the health crisis. This is all the more necessary because a large majority of SMEs, and in particular small family businesses, act at national, regional and local level and the impact of the measures taken to deal with the crisis affects all levels. In this context, the specific case of the liberal professions, which are also severely affected by the crisis, should not be forgotten. The EESC must work to ensure that this gap is filled as soon as possible.

Among the different forms of entrepreneurship, the EESC pays particular attention to **social entrepreneurship**. For years, the EESC has played an increasingly important role at inter-institutional level in promoting this form of entrepreneurship and in monitoring its development. The Section will continue to monitor political developments, identify actions to be taken, collect, compile and disseminate best practices and improve the visibility of the sector.

In this context, the **Social Economy Action Plan**, to be launched by the Commission in 2021, will need to be closely monitored.

Another area that will continue to receive the EESC's attention, as the voice of European civil society, are the **new business models**, very often based on social or environmental considerations.

Among these new economic models, **the circular economy** plays a major role in the EESC's work. In 2017, together with the European Commission and stakeholders on the ground, the Committee launched the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP).

The platform economy is another topic that the Section has followed (the EESC was one of the first institutions to deal with the collaborative economy and collaborative consumption) and should continue to follow.

The retail sector also deserves a 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 their customers' sustainability expectation. 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. The importance of sustainable development as a cross-cutting theme and priority objective of the EESC's work must be recognised.

**Envisaged initiatives:**

- *Organisation of the 5th European Day of Social Economy Enterprises*
- *Participation in the work of the GECES*
- *Organisation of seminars (e.g. in the framework of the CoR's Civil Society Days and Open Days) and participation in events on these topics*
- *Promotion of opinion INT/898 on SME Strategy*
- *Organisation of events with strategic partners (including the EP, the Commission and associations in the Member States) in order to strengthen the role of the EESC in these areas.*

### **3. An Industrial policy in transition**

Europe has always been at the forefront of industrial innovation and has helped to improve the way people produce, consume and do business. Industry has always demonstrated its ability to drive change and more than ever must continue to do so as Europe is starting its transition towards climate neutrality and digitalisation.

These **green and digital transitions** involve new technologies and therefore investment and innovation, and will lead to new types of jobs and new skills.

They will also lead to a shift from linear production to a circular economy.

As the house of European civil society, the EESC must position itself in the debate on these transitions.

Therefore, the EESC will follow ***the update of the new industrial strategy*** (which will have to take into account the effects of COVID-19, the global competitive environment and the acceleration of the double green and digital transitions) as well as ***circular economy initiatives for electronic equipment***. Digital initiatives, in particular with regard to ***artificial intelligence***, are also at the core of the Section's work, which is now building on its Digital Transition and Single Market Observatory.

The Section will also continue to be strongly ***involved in the work of the ECESP***, which it has created together with the NAT Section and the European Commission.

**Research and innovation** are essential to improve competitiveness, promote growth, create jobs and address societal challenges. These challenges range from the transition to the labour market to consumer choice and privacy. In this context, the EESC's **work on artificial intelligence** is an important reference point. In order to maintain our visibility and credibility, it is crucial to continue to monitor developments in this area.

**Competition policy** also plays a key role in the post-COVID recovery. The Section will continue to pay particular attention to it by ensuring that the EU conducts a competition policy that does not lead to

the disappearance of companies but to support them by stimulating research and innovation and investment in new products and services.

**Envisaged initiatives:**

- *Promotion of opinion INT/897 on the New Industrial Strategy*
- *Active participation in the Industry Days organised by the Commission in February 2021*
- *Participation of an EESC member in the Industry Forum to be set up by the Commission*
- *Following the update of the new industrial strategy planned for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2021 as well as circular economy initiatives for electronic equipment.*
- *Promotion of the EESC's work on artificial intelligence, in particular through the organisation of debates in the framework of the new Digital Transition and Single Market Observatory and participation in events on the subject;*
- *Organisation of an event on artificial intelligence (possibly in cooperation with the European Parliament, the Commission and/or other strategic partners) to analyse in depth the different aspects of AI and to present recommendations to the EU institutions and to strengthen the role of the EESC in this area;*
- *Drafting opinions on the legislative initiatives that the Commission plans to launch on AI*
- *Active participation in the Innovation Days organised annually by the Commission*
- *Preparing the EESC opinion on the Communication on a comprehensive approach to research, innovation, education and youth*
- *Promoting initiatives to support industrial ecosystems in the post-Covid period and to create interactions between these different ecosystems to recreate new value chains in Europe.*

**4. A modern and responsible consumer policy**

Today, thanks to the Single Market, it is much easier for EU consumers and businesses to buy and sell goods and services across borders, both online and offline. But this requires trust and confidence in the market, targeted legislation and effective enforcement.

The EESC works to ensure that consumers have the rights and protection they need. It was the first EU body to deal with collaborative consumption and launched the debate on topics such as the collaborative economy, the functional economy and the nudge concept.

As the voice of European civil society, the EESC has recognised the potential of the new economic models and the challenges (social and legal) they pose, in particular the consequences for consumers and workers. In this context, the circular economy presents responsible consumer choices, which according to the Commission's new policy (Empowering the consumer for the green transition) encourages sustainable behaviour, aware of the impact of consumption on the planet. In this respect, consumer information regarding product origin, as well as all measure to educate and inform, can help them make more responsible choices.

The EESC should continue to closely monitor new forms of consumption and production, including the legal implications for online consumers, taking into account the need to integrate environmental concerns, consumer and worker protection and growth and employment aspects.

Our annual flagship event, **the European Consumer Day**, held every year since 1999, is the meeting place where consumers gather to influence the EU debate.

***Envisaged initiatives:***

- *Organisation of the European Consumer Day 2021, as part of the Portuguese Presidency of the EU on a topic to be determined (e.g. on “The role of consumers in the green transition”);*
- *Organise consumer policy events (possibly in cooperation with the European Parliament, the Commission and/or other strategic partners)*
- *Preparing the EESC opinion on a new consumer agenda and new data regulation;*
- *Prepare the EESC opinion on new design requirements and consumer rights for electronics.*

**Internal and interinstitutional priorities**

**Inter-institutional cooperation**

In order to make the voice of organised civil society heard, the EESC needs to increase the visibility of its opinions and their follow-up to the European institutions and national representations to the EU.

It is therefore important to strengthen structured cooperation with the European Commission (the Commissioners responsible for the Section’s files and the various DGs), with the European Parliament (and in particular the IMCO and ITRE Committees), the Committee of the Regions, the Council (in particular its Competitiveness configuration), the European Council and successive presidencies.

In this context, it would be important to promote the EESC’s positions already in the pre-legislative phase; information reports could be a useful tool.

It is equally important to strengthen exchanges with representative civil society organisations, in particular, by making more regular use of hearings and debates involving practitioners, experts, scientists and politicians to discuss, exchange and identify inspiring ideas and new avenues for reflection.

**Internal cooperation**

Internal cooperation is absolutely essential. Working with all Sections as part of a cross-cutting approach that removes barriers between the different units should make our work more coherent and effective.

It is also important to organise a permanent consultation on the definition of work programmes, the selection of topics and priorities of the different Sections, combining “acquis”, “continuity” and “foresight”.

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