The EESC's activities during the Romanian Presidency

January – June 2019

European Economic and Social Committee
1 January 2019. That is when Romania takes over the baton from Austria to run the presidency of the Council of the European Union. That is the time to untie the Gordian knot: the debate on the Future of Europe, the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and on cohesion policy, Brexit and the European elections in May 2019.

Romania will need to steer discussions, demonstrate vision and be responsible for making decisions that impact the entire 28-country bloc, working together with Finland and Croatia, the two Member States that will follow it in the presidency.

The Romanian Presidency must seize this opportunity. Romanians are among the most pro-European in the EU and show a great attachment to European values. The current government has the potential to be a mediator, consolidating the European idea and including the views of Europe’s people. The EU integration process needs to be better understood, accepted and supported by those who are in the front line, the people of Europe.

On this note, I would like to congratulate Romania on the broad public consultation it held to set the priorities for its presidency, giving special attention to young people.

The EESC endorses the motto “Cohesion, a shared European value” and the priorities of the Romanian Presidency:

I. A converging Europe: growth, cohesion, competitiveness, connectivity – including sustainable development, convergence, employment and social rights, innovation and digitisation, connectivity and markets

II. A safer Europe – including strengthening internal security through border management and Schengen and the future of the area of freedom, security and justice

III. Europe, a stronger global actor – including the Common Security and Defence Policy and the efficiency of EU external action, the neighborhood policy and honouring international commitments

IV. A Europe of Common Values – including solidarity, cohesion, equal opportunities and social justice, democracy, freedom and respect for human dignity, and combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, intolerance and populism.

I can assure our friends in Romania that they can count on the EESC as an active and committed partner to carry out effective initiatives on behalf of its citizens during the EU presidency.
Our committee believes that we must ensure a smooth transition to a **society that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable**. This can be achieved in particular by implementing a smart, sustainable and innovative industrial policy, based on a strong, fair and indivisible Single Market supported by adequate investments, as well as state of the art technical and environmental developments.

We need to further reinforce our **European social model**, to have a Union that is capable of protecting and caring for all of its citizens. The effective implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights is a first step in this direction and is essential when it comes to guaranteeing social inclusion, social investment and social innovation.

Last but not least, we need to reinforce the **values of human dignity, freedom, equality, democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights**. These values ensure peace, justice, non-discrimination and diversity as one of the guarantees of an open society and define both who we are today and who we want to be tomorrow.

Putting in place a new **positive narrative** for Europe is paramount to reconnect citizens with the European project, restore their trust in politics and counter nationalist and populist tendencies. The foundation for this endeavour lies in culture, education, driving creativity, openness, solidarity and intercultural exchange.

In all these endeavours, it is vital to **put the people at the heart of the debate**, through a stronger and more structured dialogue with citizens. The EESC’s unique role as a bridge between the EU institutions and civil society is thus as important as ever. It gives voice to the grassroots and puts forward proposals that contribute to debates and open up fresh perspectives. With a view to the Sibiu European Summit, we will be sending a strong message and making a substantial contribution to the debates on relaunching the European project.

We believe in a possible “**rEUnaissance**”, that Europe can transform the existing challenges into opportunities and strive for new ambitions, linking freedom and security in a new way, taking action to bring about a new time of shared prosperity.

The Romanian Presidency represents an **opportunity** that Europe cannot afford to miss, a chance to influence the direction of change and to build a **Europe that is more tangible and better known to its citizen**.

We have already started a **relationship of openness, cooperation and dialogue with Romania** and we look forward to a very successful presidency that meets the expectations of Europe’s citizens, as they are the primary beneficiary of the European project.

*Luca JAHIER*
*President of the EESC*
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The EESC’s activities during the Romanian Presidency

As part of the preparations for the European Summit on the Future of Europe (9 May 2019), the European elections (23-26 May 2019), the appointment of the new Commission and its future work programme, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is ready to provide its contribution as the representative of organised civil society in the EU.

It will build on the numerous initiatives, documents, ideas and projects launched by the EESC in recent years and include innovative solutions and new economic models aimed at creating a new narrative for the European project that resonates emotionally with citizens and emphasises the role of civil society organisations.

In this context, the EESC will prepare an opinion for “Sibiu and beyond”, to be adopted in March 2019. At the request of the Romanian Presidency, the Committee will also draw up an exploratory opinion on “The future of the EU”, with special focus on the benefits it brings to European citizens through deeper social, economic and territorial cohesion and by ensuring respect for European values, including human dignity and the equality of citizens.

One of the most important priorities of the Romanian Presidency of the Council will be to make progress with the negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) before the European elections. On the basis of the policy recommendations set out in its opinions on the Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020 and the 36 EESC opinions on the sectoral legislative proposals on spending programmes, the EESC is ready to contribute in all possible ways to help to positively influence the negotiations with a view to their timely conclusion.

Within the ongoing debate on the economic future of Europe, the EESC will actively promote the views of organised civil society on the Commission’s Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) package of December 2017, on the sectoral EMU-related spending programmes in the next MFF, and on the new proposals for strengthening the international role of the euro.

As part of the European Semester process, the EESC will make a number of recommendations on the euro area economic policy to be pursued from 2019 onwards and on the Annual Growth Survey. The EESC will also contribute with recommendations on economic and social priorities, which are necessary to build the basis for sustainable and inclusive long-term growth. Input from national civil society organisations will be collected by the EESC through visits to each Member State and fed into the annual European Semester cycle.

Boosting jobs, growth and investment is one of the main political priorities of the Juncker Commission and the EESC has been greatly involved and offered strong support to the Commission initiatives in this area, notably the Investment Plan for Europe. The Committee will stay actively engaged in this debate by conveying civil society views after Commission’s Communication on the Investment Plan for Europe (November 2018).
With regard to taxation, the EESC is drawing up an own-initiative opinion on taxation in the digitalised economy and an opinion on the “Proposal as regards the introduction of detailed technical measures for the operation of the definitive VAT system for the taxation of trade between Member States”.

As a part of the completion of the Capital Markets Union, the Commission presented an Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth. The EESC has welcomed the initiative to establish a financial system that can foster long-term, sustainable growth by re-directing the flow of capital towards investments that take into account environmental, social and governance factors. The Committee will continue to do so in relation to the possible follow-up legislative measures in 2019.

In the course of the Romanian Presidency, the EESC intends to devote particular attention to cohesion policy post-2020. The EESC will feed into the discussions at the Council of the EU and the European Parliament with the policy proposals that it brought forward in opinions on the legislative framework for the European Structural and Investment Funds post-2020. It will also draft a new exploratory opinion on the future of cohesion policy, and contribute actively so that all relative work can be approved before the next European elections.
The Committee will also continue, in the context of the new programming period, its work on the development of urban areas, supporting the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda.

Furthermore, the EESC will continue its active participation in the implementation of macro-regional strategies by providing policy recommendations in an opinion drawn up at the request of the Romanian Presidency. This opinion will include aspects related to a better economic convergence and competitiveness within macro-regions, such as the European Strategy for the Danube region and in particular the role of transnational clusters.

As levels of inequality, poverty, social exclusion and unemployment are still alarming and as there is much divergence between regions and countries in the EU, the EESC will continue to focus on preserving and improving the European social model. It will place special emphasis on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and on the way the Social Scoreboard and the European Semester evolve as instruments to monitor the Member States’ performance.

The Committee will continue to look at the future of work and notably the impact of the digital transition and the transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient and green economy on employment, skills, equal opportunities, social security, social protection and labour law. The EESC will also continue its work on quality employment for young people and the long-term unemployed as well as on informally acquired qualifications. At the request of the Romanian Presidency, the EESC will also prepare an opinion on “Education about the European
Union, its functioning, positive achievements and concrete benefits for citizens”.

The EESC will maintain its efforts to strengthen the rule of law and fundamental rights with the consolidation of a new group on these issues. This group will support organised civil society in the Member States and look at how to promote the European values enshrined in the EU Treaty. The Committee will continue to fight discrimination and exclusion, particularly with regard to the Roma and people with disabilities, promote gender equality and raise the profile of civil society organisations working in these fields.

At the request of the Romanian Presidency, the Committee will prepare an opinion on “European Philanthropy: untapped potential”, to explore the measures and initiatives which should be taken at EU and national level in order to promote organised philanthropy.

The EESC will continue to support a more open migration and truly common asylum policy based on greater solidarity and shared responsibility in the EU. It will work to ensure better recognition of the contribution that migrants make to Europe’s economy and society, to promote their integration into the labour market and society at large, to advocate improvements to their education and training and will continue to call for their fundamental rights to be fully respected.

In relation to agriculture and rural development, the EESC will contribute to the debate on the reform process towards a modernised and simplified post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy through the promotion of its related opinion adopted in October 2018. To back the implementation of the Cork 2.0 Declaration and to keep the momentum, with the aim of ensuring a better life in rural areas, the Committee will host a European Rural Parliament mid-term event in early 2019, with the objective of drafting a set of stakeholders’ recommendations to the new European Parliament and European Commission.

Through its Temporary Study Group (TSG) on Sustainable Food Systems, the EESC will further its call for a comprehensive food policy to facilitate the transition to more sustainable food systems. The Committee will use its mediating power to put food sustainability and the development of a comprehensive food policy, as well as the potential establishment of a European Food Policy Council, high on the EU agenda. The TSG will also prepare an own-initiative opinion on “Promoting healthy and sustainable diets in the EU”, with the aim of contributing to the development of policy proposals to foster healthier food consumption.

The EESC will work on key initiatives relating to the EU Circular Economy Action Plan, with strong emphasis on promoting recent opinions on the plastics strategy and the updated EU bioeconomy strategy. As part of its work on the development of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, the EESC will continue to improve the platform’s interactive website and propose new ways to increase links and synergies between the different national, regional and local circular economy strategies, following an EESC study on the subject.
In the wider environmental field, the recent opinions on shortcomings in the implementation of EU environmental legislation will be the focal point of further EESC action. The role of European civil society in facilitating the implementation of legislation in the framework of the European Commission’s Environmental Implementation Review will be the subject of an exploratory opinion requested by Commissioner Karmenu Vella.

Contributing to the practical implementation of the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), launched by the United Nations in 2015, will continue to rank highly on the EESC’s agenda. The Committee is actively involved in the Multi-stakeholder Platform for Sustainable Development in the EU created in June 2016 by the Commission, notably by providing practical recommendations relating to monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs. In particular, the EESC will continue to promote the policy recommendations set out in its recent own-initiative opinion on “Indicators better suited to evaluate the SDGs – the civil society contribution” (September 2018). It will do so by pushing for a European Sustainable Development Strategy with concrete objectives, targets and indicators. After adopting an opinion on the Commission’s Reflection Paper on Sustainable Development in December 2018, the EESC will continue its commitment to working towards the inclusion of civil society in policy decisions, with a view to enabling faster and more effective achievement of the SDGs.

In the field of climate action, the EESC is part of an International Climate Governance Coalition (ICGC) which aims to stimulate the bottom-up engagement of various actors in a multi-stakeholder and multi-level spirit of cooperation. The EESC will continue contributing to the creation of an EU enabling framework for citizen and community-led climate initiatives through the operationalisation of a European Dialogue for Non-State Climate Action. It will concentrate new efforts on climate financing, notably through two opinions on a climate/finance pact and on specific financing means for small-scale, bottom-up climate action.

A significant part of the EESC’s activities will continue to focus on the completion of the Single Market in its various aspects. New economic models will remain high on the EESC’s agenda. After having been at the forefront of dealing with these trends, the Committee will take a more coordinated approach, making a clear link with the role that these new trends play in facing Europe’s sustainability challenges. For some years now, our societies have been profoundly transformed by the introduction of new technologies and ways of doing things (digitalisation, the circular economy, the collaborative economy, “uberisation”, etc.). This major upheaval primarily affects the younger generation and should – now more than ever – be the focus of our concerns. The Committee therefore wishes to open a cross-cutting and comprehensive discussion on this issue in order to shape the approach that will take us up to 2050. It looks forward to the Romanian Presidency’s contribution to an innovative discussion at European level, since national solutions will not be sufficient.
The EESC will also move forward with its work in the area of social enterprises and the social economy. In addition to monitoring and evaluating political developments at EU and Member State level, it will identify specific measures to improve the general environment for social economy enterprises, disseminate best practices in the Member States and raise the sector’s profile. In particular, the Committee will prepare an exploratory opinion on “Social economy enterprises’ contribution to a more cohesive and a more democratic Europe”.

As regards the field of the EU Consumer Policy, following the adoption of its opinion on the Commission’s New Deal for Consumers, the EESC will follow the political debate on this issue carefully, with a view to contributing to it by conveying civil society’s message. It will continue to collaborate closely with the European Commission and the Romanian Presidency through the public initiatives taking place in the context of this New Deal.

The EESC is also very active in the field of research and innovation. After having adopted a number of major opinions on different aspects of Artificial Intelligence, the EESC will continue following developments in this area.

The promotion of SMEs in Europe is a major concern for the EESC, which will continue to work on the best way of improving the business environment for SMEs in Europe.
As far as industry is concerned, a major area of activity will remain advancing towards a stronger industrial base in Europe. The Committee will continue to urge the European Commission and the EU Member States to adopt a long-term and comprehensive strategy with a global vision, in order to address the need for growth, job creation and sustainability. The EESC demands decisive action from the EU institutions, in order to make progress towards strengthening the competitiveness and diversity of the industrial base in Europe.

In this context, the EESC will continue to follow the work of the High-level Industrial Roundtable “Industry 2030”, where it has observer status, and it will contribute to the Industry Days 2019, which will take place in February 2019.

With regard to the overall industrial policy priority, the EESC will focus in particular on: supporting innovation, investment and employment indicators; sustaining cutting-edge industrial research, innovation and design; anticipating changes to jobs, work organisation and socially sustainable innovation in industry 4.0; energy transition and industrial change; the industrial potential of the circular economy and the prosumer and industrial change. At the same time, the Committee will continue focusing on sectoral industrial policy, including: opportunities for less industrialised regions and neglected industrial sectors; investment in strategic industrial sectors; sustainable industrial sectoral models; corporate social responsibility in all industrial sectors and the effect of Brexit on the main industrial sectors and value chains.

Building on its previous opinions, the EESC will draw up an information report on “Working with
asbestos in energy renovation” and examine in an own-initiative opinion the “Economic, technological and social changes in advanced services for the elderly”.

Regarding the need to preserve the industrial base in our regions, after a conference on “Romanian coal regions in energy transition” (September 2018, Petroşani), the EESC will hold another three round tables dedicated to the topic of “Platform for coal regions in transition” in three Member States.

As regards the European Energy Union, the EESC will build upon its previous work and continue to draw up opinions in this area. Following its own-initiative opinion on the positive economic effects of the energy transition for regions, their local communities and citizens (July 2018), the Committee will pursue its efforts to make EU energy policies more relevant to the everyday life of citizens and civil society. Specifically, the EESC will first focus on closely monitoring and engaging with the EU Energy Poverty Observatory and ensuring that the social dimension of the Energy Union remains at the heart of the Energy Union programme. Secondly, it will prepare an opinion on the forth state of the Energy Union report that reflects the priorities and interests of citizens and civil society in the pursuit of the Energy Union objectives. The Committee also intends to further strengthen its priority work on the European Energy Dialogue, which is aimed at raising awareness among civil society organisations of the energy transition and convey the interests, needs and concerns of civil society to EU decision-makers.

In the field of transport, the Committee will continue to work on enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of the European transport sector by developing intermodal and multimodal transport. The EESC will closely follow all developments in the transport sector, particularly those linked to the Commission’s ongoing initiatives deriving from
The EESC’s activities during the Romanian Presidency

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Recently, the Committee expressed its support for strengthening the capacity and role of the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA). Building on this work, the Committee will further advocate cooperation across the Union to create a safe and secure common cyber environment, notably through the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and the Network of National Coordination Centres. As regards digitalisation, the Committee

the three mobility packages, which are aimed at making rapid progress towards establishing a clean, competitive and well-connected mobility system by 2025. The EESC will also further advocate the implementation of the TEN-T policy and the Connecting Europe Facility for after 2020 under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). Finally, as a follow-up to its recent activities, the Committee will closely follow digitalisation and automation trends in transport and the implementation of sustainable development goals related to the sector.
fully supports the citizen-oriented approach announced by the Romanian Presidency. In line with this, the EESC will adopt an own-initiative opinion about the digital revolution covering the needs and rights of citizens at the beginning of 2019.

In line with the priorities of the Romanian Presidency, the Committee will promote the provision of **services of general interest (SGIs)**; more particularly, it will focus its work on European citizens’ right to access essential, affordable and high-quality services, in relation to implementing the 20th principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Regarding the **EU’s external action policies**, the Committee will focus its priority action on a peaceful **neighbourhood** and on **enlargement policies**.

The Romanian Presidency will be involved in the EESC’s work on the EU’s enlargement policy and its relations with the **Western Balkans**. The Committee will closely follow EU-Turkey relations, at a time when civil society dialogue is more necessary than ever. Improving civil society participation in the **Euromed** region will also be a key topic for the EESC under the Romanian Presidency. Regarding the **Eastern Neighbours**, active involvement of the Civil Society Platforms with **Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia** will be the main priority. The Committee will invite the Romanian Presidency to participate in various civil society bodies that provide input for our relations with those countries.

Furthermore, the Committee will pursue its active involvement in the civil society bodies that monitor trade agreements. Special attention will be paid to the agreements with **Canada, Japan, Morocco, Chile, Mexico and Mercosur**. The Romanian Presidency will be invited to follow up on the EESC’s work on those agreements.

The Committee will also continue its work with its partner organisations around the world, in **China, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the USA and Russia**.

Finally, with regard to the general objective of making EU legislation and its implementation more efficient and more effective in achieving its objectives, the EESC plays an active role in the **REFIT Platform Stakeholder Group**. It contributes to the work of the platform through EESC opinions, which provide concrete proposals in many areas, for the purpose of simplifying and rationalising EU legislation. The EESC has also contributed to the Commission’s stock-taking exercise on the Better Regulation Agenda, which will continue after 2019 and the appointment of the new Commission.
A word from the Romanian Presidency

Since 1 January 2019, Romania has, for the first time, taken over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union at a time of multiple European and global challenges, which will have a major impact on our mandate. The joint efforts of the Member States to reach consensus on the new strategic milestones in the evolution of the EU project over the next decade, bring to the fore the increased need for unity and cohesion at European level.

Against this backdrop, cohesion has become the central theme of the Romanian Presidency, and the motto chosen - “Cohesion, a common European value” - reflects Romania’s conviction that the vision we are projecting of our common future must be anchored in this original principle of European construction. This concept runs through most of the themes and objectives on the European agenda that will guide our efforts in the coming period.

First of all, strengthening cohesion at the level of political action remains essential, which is obviously a pre-condition for re-establishing the link between Member States, European institutions and citizens. Thus, we consider cohesion as both a common European value and an expression of unity between the states and regions of the European Union.

At the same time, the economic dimension of cohesion is a catalyst for reducing development gaps between Member States and between regions, and for strengthening the single market. This aspect of economic cohesion is of particular relevance to new Member States, such as Romania, for which full integration into the single market is particularly important for a fair distribution of benefits across the EU, from east to west and from north to south, so that they are felt by all European citizens.

Last but not least, cohesion must also be promoted in its social dimension, understood as the imperative of ensuring social convergence and preserving the four fundamental freedoms of the Internal Market of the European Union.

Romania has defined its priorities as the Presidency of the EU Council around the concept of cohesion, based on the current legislative agenda at European level and a strong contribution by society.

The process of developing the main pillars of the work agenda was based on broad public consultation and debate, which facilitated a more democratic, participative and transparent
dialogue between citizens and authorities. In this regard, we appreciate the efforts of the European Economic and Social Committee to act as a bridge between the EU decision-making bodies and the social partners and other civil society organisations.

During the six months of our mandate, we are proposing a pragmatic and responsible approach, focused on achieving concrete results, capable of strengthening European unity and cohesion among EU Member States.

The Romanian Presidency programme will focus on the following four pillars:

The first pillar is “Converging Europe: Growth, Cohesion, Competitiveness, Connectivity”. We are convinced that ensuring convergence and cohesion for sustainable and fair development for all citizens and Member States is essential, both for promoting a united Europe and for increasing the EU’s global competitiveness.

The second pillar, “A Europe of Safety”, aims to support cooperative initiatives on the internal security of the EU as well as to ensure greater cohesion between Member States in addressing new security challenges that threaten the safety of European citizens.

The third pillar is “Europe, a global actor”. The Romanian Presidency will pursue the consolidation of the external profile of the European Union through compliance with the common commitments assumed by the EU’s Global Foreign and Security Policy strategy, the promotion of the Union’s enlargement policy and the consistency of EU policies in its neighbourhood, increasing the efficiency of the European external action and the implementation of EU commitments at international level.

The fourth pillar of the programme, “A Europe of common values”, reflects our vision and commitment to boosting European cohesion by continually drawing on the shared values on which the Union is based. Only in this way can we effectively combat racism, intolerance, xenophobia, populism and anti-Semitism, while also helping to deter hate speech. In particular, we are pursuing policies to combat discrimination, to promote equal opportunities and equal treatment for women and men and, last but not least, to encourage citizens to engage in European debates.

It is our hope that, by means of this profile and these lines of action, sh Romania will contribute, during our six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union, to the consolidation of the European project and the advancement of the common European agenda. On this important mission, we also count on close cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee. I am confident that together we will be able to achieve concrete results, thus contributing to the revival of a stronger and more effective Union.

George CIAMBA
Minister Delegate for European Affairs
General information on Romania

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**Official name**: Romania  
**Capital**: Bucharest  
**Area**: 238 391 km²  
**Other main towns (in terms of population)**: Iaşi, Timişoara, Cluj-Napoca, Constanţa, Galaţi  
**National language**: Romanian  
**Currency**: Leu (plural Lei) (RON)  
**Population (2017)**: 22 193 562  
**GDP in current prices (in millions of euro, 2017)**: 187 939.9  
**GDP per capita (in Purchasing Power Standards [PPS], EU-28 = 100, 2017)**: 63  
**GDP growth**: 7.3% (2.4% in EU 28)  
**Employment rate (persons aged 15-64 years, 2017)**: 67.3% (73.4% in EU 28)  
**Unemployment rate (2017)**: 4.9% (7.6% in EU 28)  
**Main exports**: Electronic equipment, vehicles, machinery, mineral fuels, furniture, lighting, signs, rubber  
**Exports partners**: Germany, Italy, France, Hungary, UK  
**Main imports**: Electronic equipment, machinery, vehicles, mineral fuels, plastics, pharmaceuticals, iron and steel  
**Imports partners**: Germany, Italy, Hungary, Poland, France, China, Netherlands  
**Calling code**: +40  
**Time zone**: GMT+2
For your diary

23 – 24 January 2019  Presentation of the priorities of the Romanian Presidency, EESC plenary session, Brussels

10 – 11 April 2019  Extraordinary meeting of the Employers’ Group (Group I), Bucharest, Romania

7 – 8 May 2019  Extraordinary meeting of the Diversity Europe Group (Group III), Bucharest, Romania

9 May 2019  Informal European Summit in Sibiu, Romania

15 May 2019  Romanian cultural evening, EESC, Brussels

25 – 26 June 2019  Extraordinary meeting of the Workers’ Group (Group II), Bucharest, Romania