



# Digitalisation

CHALLENGES FOR EUROPE



*European Economic and Social Committee*



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## PREFACE

**Pierre Jean Coulon**, President of the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

**Ariane Rodert**, President of the Section for Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

The “digital revolution” is a major, crosscutting topic which greatly influences the growth and well-being of our society and is common to many activities of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). In recent years, the EESC has produced a substantial number of opinions concerning the fast development of information, digital technologies and the development of the digital single market, showing how involved organised civil society is in this “revolution”. We also are closely concerned with the human need to control, regulate and overcome the major challenges which emerge as a consequence of digitalisation.

As presidents of the TEN and INT sections, we decided to disseminate ideas on digital developments in a specific brochure that contains all the relevant EESC opinions.

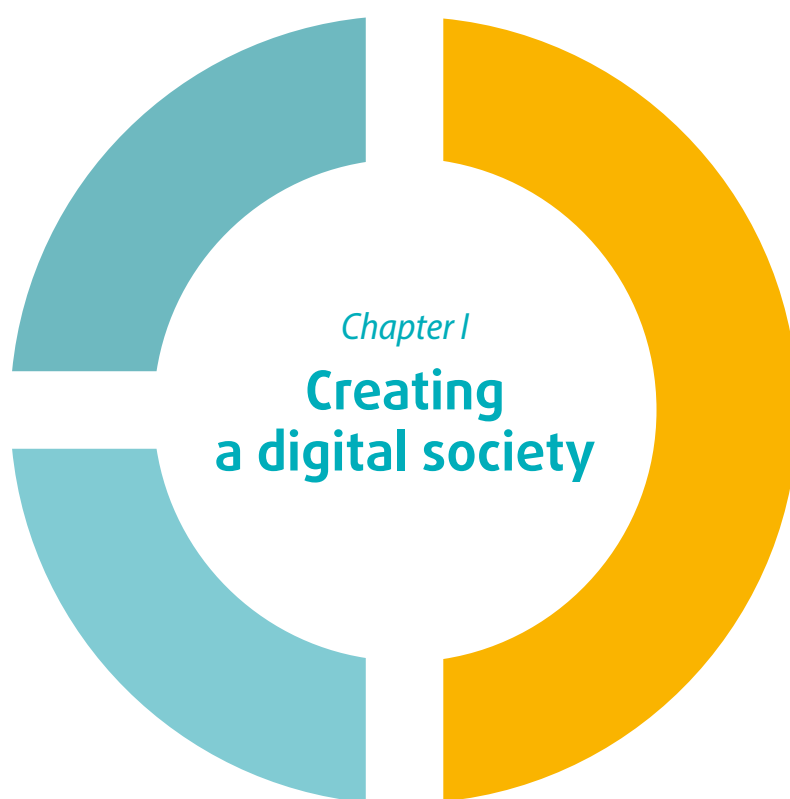
We feel that at a time of economic, social and political uncertainties, and especially on the eve of the European elections, it is even more important to stress the key role of organised civil society and the need to make EU strategies more consistent with the expectations and concerns of European citizens.

We firmly believe that the digital revolution needs to benefit and include all people, especially vulnerable people, while striving to eliminate existing digital divides and prevent further disparities emerging in this area.

We consider that European organised civil society, here represented by the EESC, has shared responsibility for actively participating in the development and regulation of this digital revolution, with the aim of ensuring an approach where people are in command, based on broad dialogue with stakeholders. This to ensure that development benefits both people and the planet with the principle that people retain command of machines. We will continue to work in this area.

Brussels, March 2019





## Digital Europe programme (MFF)

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**Rapporteur:** Norbert Kluge

**Co-rapporteur:** Ulrich Samm

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

In Europe, an upstream investment gap, in addition to research and innovation, is evident from the mismatch between the growing demand for latest technology and the supply. The Digital Europe programme, part of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal for 2021-2027, is a central element of the Commission's comprehensive response to the challenge of digital transformation. Its aim is to provide a spending instrument tailored to the operational requirements of capacity building. It will therefore focus on reinforcing Europe's capacities in high performance computing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and advanced digital skills and ensuring their wide use across the economy and society.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) welcomes the fact that the European Commission has established a Digital Europe programme, which underscores the intention to make Europe a leading player in digitalisation and to increase its economic strength and competitiveness on the world stage.

The EESC supports ethical principles being observed in any and all activity under the programme. In this context, the EESC would like to reiterate its demand that the "human in command" principle be enforced, especially in the further development and application of AI in the workplace.

The EESC takes a positive view of the fact that support for digital skills has been made a key element in the programme. Digital knowledge and skills are the prerequisite for being able to achieve the other four priorities. Digitalisation in Europe must be made inclusive. People must not be excluded from digital progress on account of factors like gender, social status, education level, skills, digital capabilities, origin, age or disability. The resultant "digital dividend" must be distributed fairly, by means of appropriate policy measures.

The EESC would like the programme to be more closely tied to social realities. The effects on labour market policy and variations in the impact of digitalisation on the regions need to be taken into account. It therefore feels that an essential criterion for the success of the programme will be for digitalisation to lead to economic participation and jobs across all the regions of Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 434 final – Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Digital Europe programme for the period 2021-2027 - 2018/0227 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Digital Europe programme for the period 2021-2027](#)

## Connected and automated mobility

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**Rapporteur:** Ulrich Samm

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The Commission proposes a comprehensive EU approach towards connected and automated mobility. With its strong industrial base and supported by an ambitious research and innovation programme and the legal framework put forward in this strategy, Europe has the strength to compete globally. It will ensure that EU legal and policy frameworks are ready to support the deployment of safe connected and automated mobility, while simultaneously addressing societal and environmental concerns, anticipating and mitigating new challenges for society, which will be decisive for public acceptance.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is convinced about the benefits of automated mobility for our society as it will provide new services for the mobility of people, with more possibilities for the shared economy, potential for optimisation of traffic with environmental advantages, and mobility for those who cannot drive themselves.

Automatic or semi-automatic driving could significantly improve the active safety of ground vehicles and might reduce fatalities significantly. The EESC believes that driverless cars (level 5) will only be accepted when they provide the same safety as other transport systems for passengers. However, it notes two problematic areas which may be a hurdle for public acceptance: a) additional costs and b) the growing complexity of driving a car.

Training in semi-automatic driving will require new skills and responsibilities. The EESC recognises eventual large-scale loss of jobs if full automation does become introduced. The Committee urges the social partners to jointly plan the future developments and eventually negotiate new collective bargaining agreements on the introduction of automation in road transport. The EESC also underlines that the product liability directive should be reformed so that it covers movable products and services, as well as products with embedded software. The Committee emphasises that any new regulation on data access for vehicles must follow the safety first principle and welcomes giving priority to regulating the protection of vehicles against cyber-attacks, ensuring secure and trustworthy communication between vehicles and infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – On the road to automated mobility: An EU strategy for mobility of the future COM\(2018\) 283 final](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions - On the road to automated mobility: An EU strategy for mobility of the future](#)

## Accessibility and reuse of public and publicly funded data

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**Rapporteur:** Baiba Miltoviča

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The vast amounts of data produced by the public sector in EU Member States is a valuable resource for the digital economy. The overall objective of this opinion is to contribute to the strengthening of the EU's data economy by increasing the amount of public sector data available for re-use, ensuring fair competition and easy access to markets based on public sector information, and enhancing cross-border innovation based on data.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The Committee generally welcomes the Commission's proposal for a revised directive as it is sure that the proposed changes will have a beneficial <sup>effect</sup> on the general aims for improvement.

However, the proposed changes are not sufficient to effectively improve the problematic areas of existing directive. If one of the main reasons for amending the directive and one of the main goals is to prevent the problems identified in the assessment of the directive's current application, a more active and targeted approach is needed and a "high legislative intensity" options must be chosen in order to solve specific problems.

A further evaluation should be conducted of the position of the stakeholder groups concerning the choice of solutions for preventing existing problems and assessing the overall weight and impact of the various stakeholder groups, leading to a more objective and more informed choice of options for every of issues.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM \(2018\) 232 final – Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the re-use of public sector information \(recast\) 2018/0111 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the re-use of public sector information \(recast\) and Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Towards a common European data space"](#)

## Fairness and transparency for users of online intermediation services and search engines

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**Rapporteur:** Marco Vezzani

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

More than a million EU enterprises trade through online platforms. At the same time, there are only a limited number of successful platforms. This brings advantages to the online platforms and at the same time leads to an increased dependency of businesses on online platforms when they want to access markets and consumers. The current regulatory framework is not effective in preventing these practices. This situation affects all actors in the platform ecosystems, including consumers.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC welcomes the Commission's proposal for a regulation and considers it to be an important first step towards promoting fairness and transparency.

Nonetheless, the Committee considers that this regulation alone cannot resolve all the digital single market's problems. The transparency, as a cornerstone of the regulation, will not suffice to regulate a highly dynamic and complex market, as is the case with the digital market. The disparities in terms of strength between global players and business users (particularly SMEs) can only be addressed by establishing clearer boundaries and relationships between stakeholders and combating abuse of a dominant position.

The EESC recommends including in the regulation a ban on price parity clauses, which continue to hinder competition and harm businesses and consumers and which could turn the major online platforms into oligopolies or monopolies. The Committee also recommends prompt action to tackle the social dimension of digitalisation. The same level of consideration should be given to issues related to tax dumping, the data economy and data ownership and should be tackled by means of a holistic approach, as the Commission is already doing in other fields.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 238 final – Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on promoting fairness and transparency for business users of online intermediation services 2018/0112 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on promoting fairness and transparency for business users of online intermediation services](#)

## Modernisation of the regulations establishing a .eu top-level domain name

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**Rapporteur:** Philippe De Buck

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The .eu top-level domain (TLD) is the domain name of the European Union and its citizens. Since the adoption of the .eu Regulations, the political and legislative context in the Union and the online environment and market have changed considerably. The general objective of this REFIT initiative is to ensure the stability and sustainability of the .eu TLD, so as to better enable it to achieve its intended mission to encourage online cross-border activities in Europe and support the Digital Single Market and to build an online European identity.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The aim of the proposal is, on the one hand, to deal with outdated provisions and, on the other hand, to be able to react more quickly to upcoming developments. The EESC endorses the widening of the eligibility conditions for physical persons to obtain a .eu domain name. Residence within a Member State of the European Union is no longer a prerequisite. Allowing any national of a Member State, whatever their country of residence, to obtain a .eu domain name will not only increase the profile of the EU, but will also explicitly demonstrate an affinity with the EU. The EESC supports the creation of a Multistakeholder Council and wishes to be represented in it.

The EESC wishes to underline the fact that due to the importance of an internet identifier for EU citizens, companies and organisations, the .eu domain name has to be considered as a Service of General Interest (SGI). Therefore the registry has to be a non-profit organisation, dealing only with the operational management of the domain name, and any surplus has to be passed to the EU budget. The EESC takes note that the registry is appointed after an open tender procedure but wants to stress that everything should be undertaken to maintain .eu operations without any disruptions. The Committee requests that the entire process is made wholly transparent. All the selection criteria should be clearly defined well in advance, in particular if the registry could or could not be a commercial company.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 231 final – Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation and functioning of the .eu Top Level Domain name and repealing Regulation \(EC\) No 733/2002 and Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 874/2004, 2018/0110 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation and functioning of the .eu Top Level Domain name and repealing Regulation \(EC\) No 733/2002 and Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 874/2004](#)



# High Performance Computing

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**Rapporteur:** Ulrich Samm

**Co-rapporteur:** Antonio Longo

## Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

High Performance Computing (HPC) is at the core of major advances and innovations in the digital age and a key technology for science, industry, and society at large. Europe's scientific capabilities, industrial competitiveness and sovereignty depend critically on access to world-leading HPC and data infrastructure. The EuroHPC Joint Undertaking, a pan-European integrated exascale supercomputing infrastructure, will start operating in 2019. Achieving the above objectives will require a new legal and financial instrument allowing two world-class pre-exascale to be procured (in 2019/2020) and made available to public and private users in order to develop leading scientific and industrial applications that will foster the development of a broad pre-exascale ecosystem in Europe.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC endorses this initiative for a EuroHPC Joint Undertaking as a concrete step in line with the European cloud strategy as well as part of a wider EU strategy. This initiative brings clear EU added value with a key technology which will help to tackle the most challenging issues of our modern society and will ultimately be beneficial for our well-being, competitiveness and jobs.

The EESC considers the starting investment of EUR 1 billion for the acquisition and operation of world-class supercomputing machines as significant but not too ambitious. However, it is convinced that a substantial increase in the investments (in EU Member States) combined with a strong European research and innovation programme will be necessary to maintain a world class level in HPC applications.

The EESC endorses the industrial approach for developing the next generation of low-power microchips in Europe. This would make the EU less dependent on imports and secure access to top HPC technology. The EESC points out that the development of such microchips also has an impact on small-scale computing because the high-end integrated circuits can be adapted (downscaling) to appliances in the mass market (PCs, smartphones, automotive sector).

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 8 final 2018/00035 \(NLE\) – Proposal for a Council Regulation on establishing the European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Regulation on establishing the European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking](#)

## Free flow of non-personal data in EU

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**Rapporteur:** Jorge Pegado Liz

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The general policy objective of the initiative for the free flow of non-personal data in the European Union is to achieve a more competitive and integrated internal market for data storage and other processing services and activities. To unlock this potential, the proposal aims to address the following issues: improving the mobility of non-personal data across borders in the single market, which is limited today in many Member States by localisation restrictions or legal uncertainty in the market; ensuring that the powers of competent authorities to request and receive access to data for regulatory control purposes, such as for inspection and audit, remain unaffected; and making it easier for professional users of data storage or other processing services to switch service providers and to port data.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The Commission's proposal represents one of the most important legal aspects of the future European policy for developing the data economy. The EESC considers, however, that the proposal is rather overdue, over and above the fact that the limited nature of its scope of application, the fluidity and lack of assertiveness of the mechanisms laid down and, most of all, the lack of ambition and political will and determination are likely to undermine its objectives. The Commission should and could have been more ambitious.

With regard to the first objective, the EESC does not consider it to be sufficient merely to require Member States to notify "any draft act that contains a new data localisation requirement or modifies an existing data localisation requirement". The EESC does not accept the fact that no specific procedure is being established for cases where Member States do not comply.

With regard to the second objective, the EESC does not agree that the proposal should be limited, putting forward only a procedure for cooperation between competent authorities of each Member State, with the creation of a network of single contact points.

In relation to the third objective, the EESC rejects the proposal that the Commission limits itself to undertaking to "encourage and facilitate the development of self-regulatory codes of conduct at Union level", a matter for which only legislative measures should consequently be considered.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017\) 495 final – Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a framework for the free flow of non-personal data in the European Union](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a framework for the free flow of non-personal data in the European Union](#)

# Building a European Data Economy

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**Rapporteur:** Joost Van Iersel

## Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The "data economy" is an ecosystem of different types of market players collaborating to ensure that data is accessible and usable and enables the market players to extract value from this data. The Commission's objective is to create a clear and adapted policy and legal framework for the data economy, by removing remaining barriers to the movement of data and addressing legal uncertainties created by new data technologies. Further objectives aim at increased availability and use of data, the fostering of new data business models as well as improving the conditions for access to data and the development of data analytics in the EU.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The data economy is a central and critical enabler of the new economy. The aim is to build a Europe-based data ecosystem as an indispensable vector of economic and social progress, as well as robust competitiveness in a world that is in the process of radical transformation.

The Commission should carry out a precise analysis of the state of play and of defensive attitudes to the free flow of data in the Member States in order to remove unjustified barriers by putting the right legal and technical provisions in place.

Nonetheless, much more is at stake than legal and practical provisions. European core competences must urgently be adjusted in the context of the current transformation process. Establishing a data eco-system requires first of all awareness-building in business, public services, in society and among the Member States. There is a need for greater trust and openness and a willingness among all players to share data. A pro-active mindset is needed to open up to increasing flows of data and develop the ability to process big data. Flexible and more adaptable business models must be put in place.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017/\) 9 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Building a European data economy](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Building a European Data Economy](#)

## 5G for Europe: an action plan

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**Rapporteur:** Mihai Manoliu

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The European Union is developing the backbone of digital infrastructure that will support its future competitiveness. 5G is a key factor in enabling industrial transformations to reach the full potential of the European industry in the coming years, namely through wireless broadband services provided at gigabit speeds, the support of new types of applications connecting devices and objects (the Internet of Things) and versatility by software virtualisation allowing innovative business models across multiple sectors.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC endorses the Commission's objectives of deploying the initial 5G networks by 2018 and launching commercial services in Europe by the end of 2020. To achieve these goals, the Committee recommends that the Commission works with the Member States and international bodies to resolve technical problems relating to frequencies and bandwidth. It is also necessary to develop specific standards as a prerequisite for fair labour relations and for an objective assessment of dysfunctions and the progress made towards meeting the objectives.

Being aware of the potential risks, the Committee is in favour of compensating for the lack of private investment in isolated or sparsely populated areas through public investment or other financing solutions (based on the Structural Funds), taking into account the impact on the local economy, telework, the provision of healthcare services and new education opportunities (spill-over effect).

The EESC considers that through interoperability, transparency and data security, 5G networks can make a significant contribution to modernising the public administrations of Member States and in that sense wishes to highlight the potential role of SMEs in the digital arena. Finally, the EESC considers that developing digital skills among the general public and the labour force, with particular attention paid to disabled people, must be a priority for the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 588 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – 5G for Europe: An Action Plan](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – 5G for Europe: An Action Plan](#)

## Internet connectivity in local communities

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**Rapporteur:** Emilio Fatovic

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

One of the Commission's strategic aims for the Union to be achieved by 2025 is to equip with Gigabit internet connections those sites where public services are provided, such as public administrations, libraries, health centres and outdoor public spaces. To support this objective, the Commission's new Telecommunications package will promote the deployment of local wireless access points through simplified planning procedures. The proposed measure provides for a simple financing mechanism. Funding will be limited to situations where no freely accessible public or private access points delivering very high-speed broadband exist.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC warmly welcomes the Commission's Wifi4EU initiative aiming to grant free internet access in public places throughout Europe which will benefit primarily the most disadvantaged social groups and create economic growth, particularly in the areas of public services, health, trade and tourism. The EESC proposes a single digital identity within the Wifi4EU initiative as it would have a considerable impact in terms of strengthening the sense of European citizenship.

The EESC advocates a high-quality free WiFi service with a minimum connection speed of 100 megabit/s and calls for establishing goals for both social and technological development, so as to make the Wifi4EU initiative more dynamic, long-term and sustainable.

However, the Committee considers that the EUR 120 million budget is totally inadequate and calls for a substantial increase in the funds allocated supplementing the public initiative with public-private partnerships. At the same time, it calls on the Commission to set at a minimum of three years the obligation to provide the service, subject to repayment of the funds received. In addition, the EESC considers the criteria outlined for the allocation of funds (first come, first served basis and the geographical criterion) to be unclear and contradictory and thus recommends the population and geographical size of the countries are taken into account, so that all regions can access it in a balanced way.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 589 final - Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulations \(EU\) No 1316/2013 and \(EU\) No 283/2014 as regards the promotion of Internet connectivity in local communities](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulations \(EU\) No 1316/2013 and \(EU\) No 283/2014 as regards the promotion of Internet connectivity in local communities](#)

# Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC)

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**Rapporteur:** Jorge Pegado Liz

## Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The changing market and technological environment make it necessary to strengthen the institutional framework by enhancing the role of the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications ("BEREC"). The new BEREC, a fully-fledged Union decentralised agency aligned with the principles of the Common Approach, will have a broader mandate, should continue the work of BEREC and continue the pooling of expertise from national regulatory authorities ("NRAs").

The aim of the Commission's proposal, complementing other electronic communications legal and policy instruments, is to provide BEREC with an appropriate and efficient governance structure, mandate and the tools it needs to ensure a consistent implementation of the regulatory framework.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC supports the intention behind the Commission's proposal to increase the responsibilities, competences and powers of the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC).

However, the Committee regrets that the Commission preferred to confine BEREC to the area - albeit reinforced - of cooperation or coordination. The EESC is of the firm opinion that turning BEREC into a genuine regulatory authority, will mean being able to take a forward-looking approach and provide proper regulation of new pan-EU or global information services, currently largely unregulated or subject to unclear regulatory frameworks (M2M, OTT and other areas of great importance to the Union, such as roaming or transnational markets), or binding pan-European assignment procedures for specific bands.

Finally, a point which specifically deserves careful consideration and review concerns the composition, organisation and functioning of the Board of Appeal, in order to ensure in all cases genuine independence and impartiality and an adequate appeal system, especially when it comes to decisions relating to cross-border disputes.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 591 final - Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications - 2016/0286 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications](#)

# European Electronic Communications Code

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**Rapporteur:** Jorge Pegado Liz

## Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The new usage and operational changes expose the current rules to new challenges that must be factored into a review of the regulatory framework for electronic communications.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC endorses the general thinking outlined by the Commission's proposal on the European Electronic Communications Code, in particular the timing, the approach to the subject and the manner in which it has tackled the codification and horizontal recasting of the four existing directives, bringing them together in a single directive.

The EESC also agrees with the main objectives of the proposal, aimed at securing better internet connectivity for everyone, and in particular: the concern about the accessibility for "users with disabilities", as well as the need to "lay down the [...] end-users' rights" better; the relevance of wording new concepts and definitions, important for clarifying and interpreting the legal framework; the change to the procedures for analysing the market and codifying best practice; facilitating the sharing of the 5G spectrum and promoting access for end users to basic WiFi connectivity, shared use of the spectrum; and greater independence for national regulatory and other authorities responsible for this area.

On the other hand, the EESC has serious misgivings and strong doubts about the following points: some innovations introduced into the "universal service" provisions which involve replacing services and even abolishing a series of requirements (e.g. public payphones); the definition of functional broadband; reference to social assistance and welfare; the express choice of the maximum harmonisation method as regards users' rights, at a low level of protection; shortcomings in the regulation of certain practices reported as unfair in contracts with users; and the fact that this proposal does not correspond to the Council's express wish that there be a European code of rights for users of electronic communications services.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 590 final – Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Electronic Communications Code \(Recast\) – 2016/0288 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Electronic Communications Code \(Recast\)](#)

## European Gigabit Society

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**Rapporteur:** Ulrich Samm

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

In order to benefit fully from the social and economic advantages associated with changes in the communications sector, the EU must meet three strategic objectives by 2025: gigabit connectivity in places driving socio-economic development, including in rural areas; 5G coverage for all urban areas and all major land-based transport axes; and access for all European households to internet connectivity offering at least 100 Mbps.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC welcomes the Commission communication and the related initiatives, i.e. the adoption of the European Electronic Communications Code, the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), the 5G action plan and the support scheme for public authorities wanting to offer free wifi access (WiFi4EU).

The EESC notes that the fragmentation of network providers makes it necessary to modernise and support the single market, and welcomes the proposal to establish an EU network of broadband competence offices as well as a credit system designed to lower administrative burdens and costs especially for small communities and SMEs.

Furthermore, the EESC believes that the economic and social benefits of the transformation to a Gigabit economy depend on the roll-out of high-capacity networks in urban and rural areas and across all of society. In this connection, there will be a need for investments to cover all remote areas and guarantee access for the most vulnerable. Finally, the EESC is pleased to note the free "WiFi4EU" initiative for all Europeans in public places, and recommends following the Regulation on electronic IDentification Authentication and Signature, which offers guarantees for data protection and public security.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 587 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Connectivity for a Competitive Digital Single Market - Towards a European Gigabit Society](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Connectivity for a Competitive Digital Single Market - Towards a European Gigabit Society](#)



# Mid-term evaluation of the Connecting Europe Facility (formerly Smart Islands)

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**Rapporteur:** Meelis Joost

## Background

The *Mid-term evaluation of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)* is one of the evaluations on which the Commission has consulted the EESC. The CEF is an EU financing tool which aims to support growth, employment and competitiveness through targeted investment in infrastructure, in the areas of transport, energy and ICT, at European level.

## Gist of the information report<sup>1</sup>

Transport, energy and ICT are the core of the EESC Smart Islands Project. The project is based on the idea that islands have unique economic, social and territorial characteristics that may promote growth and job creation, when appropriate, innovative initiatives are implemented. The EESC highlights the need for smaller-scale projects connecting islands to the mainland and to each other.

The EESC calls on the European Commission (EC) to pay special attention to the efforts made by EU islands, in particular those which have been adopting smart solutions. Many projects in the planning phase or being implemented require technical assistance and funding.

The EESC stresses that broadband connections and free WiFi are crucial for European island communities. Affordable broadband connections would enable increasing use of smart tools for teleworking, e-commerce and education, allowing islanders to continue living on their islands. The EESC emphasises that renewable energies and energy efficiency systems, such as smart grid, heating and street lighting, should be accessible to islanders. The EESC underlines as well that innovative, accessible and affordable modes of maritime and inland transport are vital for sustainable tourism development. Local policies, such as soft mobility, should also be widely disseminated among island communities. Finally, the EESC recommends that local authorities use an interactive approach. Multilevel governance tools, such as SmileGov, used by many European islands should be highlighted as a suitable model.

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<sup>1</sup> [Information report of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Mid-term evaluation of the Connecting Europe Facility \(formerly Smart Islands\)](#)

# Mid-term evaluation of the Connecting Europe Facility (formerly Smart Cities)

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**Rapporteur:** Isabel Caño Aguilar

## Background

The *Mid-term evaluation of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)* is one of the 21 evaluations and fitness checks on which the Commission consulted the EESC. The CEF was proposed as a common financing programme for the completion of trans-European infrastructure networks in the fields of transport, energy and ICT. These three sectors are at the core of the ongoing TEN SecTion project entitled "Smart cities". This project is a follow up on the EESC own-initiative opinion on Smart cities as a driver of a new European industrial policy (TEN/568).

## Gist of the information report<sup>1</sup>

The EESC considers that smart cities can become drivers for new European industrial development. The ultimate aim of the "Smart cities" project is to produce a best practice catalogue that will be disseminated between our stakeholders across the Union.

It will be possible to meet the expectations of city "users" – inhabitants, businesses, visitors and administrators – thanks to digital service ecosystems overlaying high-quality material and immaterial enabling infrastructure. Establishing this infrastructure will also have a significant impact in terms of growth, employment and productivity.

The term "Next Production Revolution" (NPR) refers to the transformation brought about by innovation that is affecting every productive sector in an increasingly pervasive manner. Innovation linked to the NPR – which will have an impact on the jobs and lives of citizens and must therefore be managed – may become the greatest source of prosperity and growth in the years to come. Against this backdrop, Smart Cities and Lands could become a cradle for the most innovative models of production and consumption, provided that they are the focus of growth policies able to speed up the convergence of the three types of infrastructure: ultra-wide-band, data, sensors and actuators; outdoor and indoor smart grids, renewable energy sources and charging stations; and innovative mobility and logistics.

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<sup>1</sup> [Information report of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Mid-term evaluation of the Connecting Europe Facility \(formerly Smart Cities\)](#)

# Communication on online platforms and the Digital Single Market

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**Rapporteur:** Thomas McDonogh

## Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

Online platforms have dramatically changed the digital economy over the last two decades and bring many benefits in today's digital society. The objective of this Communication is twofold: the Commission outlines the key issues it identified in the assessment of online platforms, and presents its position on both the innovation opportunities and the regulatory challenges presented by online platforms.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The Committee stresses the pressing need to tackle the risk of fragmentation and the necessity of a coherent EU approach. Otherwise different national rules will create uncertainty, make scaling-up more difficult for startups and potentially limit the availability of digital services.

Many online platforms are important elements of the collaborative economy, in which regard the EESC reaffirms its findings on the collaborative economy, especially on consumer protection, workers and self-employed people.

The EESC calls for programmes to raise awareness and provide greater digital literacy for all citizens of all ages. It welcomes the Commission's indication that it is working with online platforms on a code of conduct designed to combat online hate speech and content harming minors and it thinks that some kind of sanctions need to be introduced. The Committee is, however, disappointed that the Commission has once again overlooked the social dimension of online platforms. Platforms' social responsibility towards their works needs to be more precisely defined, and the Committee calls for an EU framework on crowd working to prevent problems with pay rates, working time regulations and social security regulations. The EESC calls for a study of the fiscal aspects related to the activity of online platforms, counteracting practices that run counter to a level playing field.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 288 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Online Platforms and the Digital Single Market – Opportunities and Challenges for Europe](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Online Platforms and the Digital Single Market - Opportunities and Challenges for Europe](#)

## Review of the wholesale roaming market in the EU

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**Rapporteur:** Raymond Hencks

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

Regulation (EU) 2015/2120 requires retail roaming surcharges to be abolished in the Union from 15 June 2017, subject to fair usage of roaming services and the possibility of applying a sustainability derogation mechanism of the abolition of retail roaming charges. The regulation at retail level alone is not sufficient to implement RLAH; national wholesale roaming markets need to be competitive and deliver wholesale roaming prices that enable operators to sustainably offer retail roaming services without any additional charges.

This initiative therefore aims to regulate the functioning of national wholesale roaming markets in order to abolish retail roaming surcharges by 15 June 2017 without distorting the domestic visited and home markets.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC supports the Commission's initiatives to achieve "roam-like-at-home" from 15 June 2017 as well as its efforts to eliminate the failures of the wholesale roaming market.

However, pre-emptive measures will be necessary to prevent operators from compensating for the drop in revenue resulting from the abolition of roaming charges by increasing domestic charges or by means of other improper practices. The EESC also expresses serious reservations about the new possibility given to operators to negotiate "innovative wholesale pricing schemes" outside the regulated prices (caps) that would not be directly linked to the actual volumes consumed. Commercial negotiations based on flat payments are likely to lead to cartels and abuses of dominant positions.

Finally, the EESC suggests that the provisions dealing with disputes should be fleshed out and national authorities should be asked to encourage the parties involved, where appropriate, to first resort to resolving disputes via an alternative dispute resolution procedure.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 399 final - Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation \(EU\) No 531/2012 as regards rules for wholesale roaming markets - 2016/0185 \(COD\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation \(EU\) No 531/2012 as regards rules for wholesale roaming markets](#)

## Review of the Audio-Visual Media Services Directive

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**Rapporteur:** Raymond Hencks

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

As part of its strategy for the digital single market, the Commission proposes the modernisation of the AVMSD Directive in order to create a more equitable environment, promote European cultural diversity and European films, better protect minors, fight against hate speech and incitement to violence, ensure the independence of the regulatory authorities of audiovisual, and provide greater flexibility regarding advertising. The revised Directive will also apply to video-on-demand and user-generated content.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC makes several comments aimed at improving the original Commission proposal. The EESC considers it crucial not to subordinate the protection of vulnerable persons, such as minors or young persons, and the participation of people with disabilities and elderly, poor or excluded people to economic considerations.

The EESC supports the dissemination of European works and the obligation on the providers of audiovisual media services to offer a minimum quota of European works, and asks for the quota to be increased to 50%. Likewise, the EESC is opposed to the option granted to Member States to impose financial contributions on on-demand services.

The EESC supports the alignment of the standards of protection applicable to providers of video-sharing platforms with those applicable to television broadcasting. The EESC calls for a precise time period to be set in order to include a ban on alcohol advertising. The EESC supports the promotion of co-regulation and self-regulation by means of codes of conduct. The EESC is opposed to the proposal to allow audiovisual media services more space and flexibility for advertising. Finally, the EESC believes that the rules concerning monitoring need to be reviewed and supplemented.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 287 final - Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services in view of changing market realities - 2016/0151 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services in view of changing market realities](#)

## eGovernment Action plan 2016-2020

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**Rapporteur:** Raymond Hencks

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The digital transformation of government is a key element to the success of the Single Market; helping to remove existing digital barriers and preventing further fragmentation arising in the context of the modernisation of public administrations. Modern administrations should deliver public services for citizens and businesses. The new eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 aims to modernise public administration, complete the digital internal market, and engage more with citizens and businesses to deliver high quality services.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

EGovernment can only work if other prerequisites, such as the provision of an efficient network and digital services, universal, affordable access and adequate digital training for users, are met. Whilst eGovernment is supposed to become the default means of communication in the medium or long term, traditional means of communicating with public administrations (postal delivery, personal contact, telephone) should be maintained for members of the public who wish to use them.

As regards the "once only" principle, according to which individuals and businesses should not have to supply the same information to public administrations more than once, the EESC notes that there are still unresolved legal and organisational problems and calls on the Commission to launch a pilot scheme in this area.

The EESC also regrets that the "no legacy" principle, which involves renewing IT systems and technologies in public administrations so as to keep pace with technological developments, does not feature among the adopted principles. It insists on citizens and businesses having an explicit right to delete their personal data (right to be forgotten) and urges the Commission to submit a proposal for a secure European archive and online document exchange system. Finally, the Committee regrets that the action plan makes no reference whatsoever to the social implications and consequences of eGovernment, or to the repercussions for employment.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 179 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 – Accelerating the digital transformation of government](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 – Accelerating the digital transformation of government](#)

## Priorities for ICT Standardisation for the Digital Single Market

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**Rapporteur:** Gundars Strautmanis

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

Common standards ensure the interoperability of digital technologies and are the foundation of an effective Digital Single Market. This Communication sets out a comprehensive strategic and political approach to the standardisation of information and communication technologies (ICT). The goal is to ensure that ICT-related standards are set in a way that is more responsive to policy needs, agile, open, more strongly linked to research and innovation, better joined-up, and thus that they ultimately have more impact for the wider European economy as it transforms into a digital one.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC believes that standardisation should help to increase added value, secure employment in all areas and improve the wellbeing of society as a whole. It is therefore particularly important to identify the priority domains where standardisation is to be carried out, so as to resolve these issues which are vital to everyone.

The EESC recommends that information should be distributed regarding the recurring activities and that the Commission's future communications should contain specific details about the participation of various stakeholders and about the social consequences of its approach in the field of ICT standardisation, which already affects the whole of society.

Finally, while the Committee supports the Commission communication as a whole, the EESC would nevertheless suggest evaluating: whether the notion of "leadership" should be re-examined, and whether the Commission communication should perhaps focus on partnership-based cooperation with global standardisation organisations rather than following the principles of competition; and whether, in terms of its form, the communication is sufficient to achieve the stated objectives, e.g. providing "leadership", or whether it might be necessary to use forms that allow for more action and decisiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 176 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: ICT Standardisation Priorities for the Digital Single Market](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – ICT Standardisation Priorities for the Digital Single Market](#)

## European Cloud Initiative

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**Rapporteur:** Antonio Longo

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The European Cloud Initiative aims to strengthen Europe's position in data-driven innovation, improve competitiveness and cohesion, and help create a Digital Single Market in Europe. This initiative will provide European science, industry and public authorities with a world-class data infrastructure to store and manage data, high-speed connectivity to transport data, and ever more powerful High Performance Computers to process data.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC supports and endorses the Commission's strategic choice of an open European computing cloud geared to the scientific community, as part of a strong political and economic commitment to digital innovation.

The EESC calls for greater clarity on how the European Data Infrastructure, which is also intended to promote development and the implementation of High Performance Computing (HPC), will interact with the flagship initiative to boost quantum technologies. The EESC recommends that the hardware and software needed for the European cloud be acquired in Europe, and calls for greater clarity regarding the financial resources provided by various framework programmes, the structural funds, the CEF and the EFSI.

In order to offer businesses and the public a clear and secure legislative framework in such a strategic but also complex and fast-changing sector as the digital one, the EESC proposes that a "single digital Europe portal" be set up, so citizens and businesses have ready access to relevant EU texts.

Lastly, the EESC emphasises that if a fully-fledged digital revolution is to take place, there is a need for education and training for every age group of the European population, whether working or not. The EESC highlights the need to invest in the technological training of women and in enabling them to access senior and management posts in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM/2016/0178 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: European Cloud Initiative - Building a competitive data and knowledge economy in Europe](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: European Cloud Initiative - Building a competitive data and knowledge economy in Europe](#)



## The use of the 470-790 MHz frequency band in the Union

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**Rapporteur:** Raymond Hencks

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe has a vision of universal, high-quality connectivity for businesses and the public. The strategy includes specific proposals from the Commission on "the coordinated release of the 694-790 MHz ('700 MHz') band, which is particularly well-suited for ensuring the provision of broadband services in rural areas". The strategy has three major strands: harmonised technical conditions for wireless broadband electronic communications services in the 700 MHz frequency band; a common deadline for making the 700 MHz band available for effective use in line with the harmonised technical conditions, and the necessary coordination measures; and priority for distribution of audiovisual media services (AVMS) in the sub-700 MHz frequency.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC welcomes the Commission's proposal for coordinated release, together with a specific timetable, of the newly available capacity on the 694-790 MHz frequency (referred to as 700 MHz). This will enable mobile operators to provide wireless broadband services in the framework of advanced 4G and the future 5G technology, while reducing the geographical digital divide by improving coverage of rural areas.

It fears, however, that the prices of the new technology used in the 700 MHz band, together with the auction price of the new capacity, could entail additional costs for consumers, as well as for some small enterprises, which would be unaffordable, to the point where there is a risk that a large number of vulnerable people may not have the financial means to participate in the new digital drive. The EESC therefore calls on the Member States to set up a support scheme, in compliance with the EU rules on State aid, to avoid any further deepening of the economic divide.

Finally, given that the physical properties of radio spectrum propagation in the 700 MHz band may well rekindle the debate on the potential health effects of exposure to electromagnetic fields, the EESC urges the Commission once again to continue its work in this area, in line with the precautionary principle, particularly as more in-depth research is still needed.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 43 final - Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the use of the 470-790 MHz frequency band in the Union - 2016/027 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the use of the 470-790 MHz frequency band in the Union](#)

## Digital Market Strategy

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**Rapporteur:** Raymond Hencks

**Corapporteur:** Thomas McDonogh

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The European Commission has set the creation of a Digital Single Market as one of its key priorities. The Digital Single Market strategy will be built on three pillars: better access for consumers and businesses to online goods and services across Europe, involving removal of key differences between the online and offline worlds to break down barriers to cross-border online activity; creating the right conditions for digital networks and services to flourish, requiring high-speed, secure and trustworthy infrastructures and content services; and maximising the growth potential of our European Digital Economy, requiring investment in ICT infrastructures and technologies.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC supports the European Digital Single Market Strategy, which is an extension of existing digital strategies and programmes. Its intention is to end the fragmentation of European digital policy into 28 strategies and national digital markets and merge them within a European approach, so as to guarantee a leading position for the EU in the global digital economy.

The EESC is convinced that the European Union can still catch up. The EESC strongly recommends developing multidisciplinary research poles and European synergies in the European Research Area, in spheres such as cloud computing, nano-electronics, the storage and processing of big data, appliances that can be consulted or controlled remotely (connected objects), and smart services.

The EESC regrets the absence of a social dimension in the digital strategy, as the development of business services and models will lead to profound changes in the labour market. It is necessary to take into account not only potential benefits but also the many risks and challenges, particularly in the fields of security, work organisation and social security. The EESC believes that the social dimension, with all its implications for employment, should form the fourth pillar of the European Digital Single Market Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2015\) 195 final – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe](#)

# Smart cities as a driver of a new European industrial policy

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**Rapporteure:** Daniela Rondinelli

## Background

In recent years, many local authorities have dedicated large investments for the development and implementation of smart cities projects, with the aim to modernise the urban framework and improve the quality of life of citizens. This own initiative opinion proposal aims to improve the efficiency of the smart city projects through truly involving civil society, taking a holistic approach in implementation and being a key contributor to a new European industrial policy. Smart City projects can only succeed if all civil society actors are actively engaged and empowered to identify, develop and deploy innovative solutions.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC considers that smart cities can become drivers for development of a new European industrial policy that can influence the development of specific productive sectors, extending the benefits of the digital economy onto a large scale.

To achieve this, it is essential to converge towards a development model that is more advanced and effective than those applied to date, which have been characterised by extremely fragmented action. For this reason, the EESC is proposing that the other European institutions and the national governments couple the concept of "smartness" with a sustainable, integrated development model that can be applied to a city, island, subnational entity or industrial district and that features the coexistence and simultaneous integration of six enabling pillars:

- technologies and tools for energy efficiency and integration of renewable sources;
- dissemination of technology platforms and connectivity to set up the new digital service systems;
- new digital services to improve the quality of life and work of the public and businesses;
- upgrading of infrastructure and urban redesign;
- education and training of individuals, businesses and the public sector in digital skills;
- an economically and financially viable model for investment.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Smart cities as drivers for development of a new European industrial policy \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Smart islands

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**Rapporteur:** Anna Maria Darmanin

### Background

Islands within the European Union face specific realities, which are often completely different to mainland Europe. Having specific barriers in terms of grid connectivity, transportation and internet connectivity, islands face realities that need to be evaluated distinctively.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

Islands have unique characteristics which bring specific difficulties, but these characteristics can be turned around to become opportunities if smart and sustainable development policies are implemented to give islands the competitive advantages that derive from sustainable growth and better jobs.

The EESC proposes a whole series of smart policy recommendations with a view to boosting smart islands, each of which is explained and described in detail in points 4 to 11 below. They relate to:

- the digital agenda: investment in infrastructure, completion of the single market and investment in research and development;
- energy supply: islands as test beds for ocean, tidal, wave, solar and wind energy; and the combination thereof these technologies;
- urban mobility and transport: H2020 and Interreg having programmes targeted at maritime transport and urban mobility with a view to sustainability in islands; combining state aid with sustainable transport;
- maritime policy: maritime surveillance; R&D in sea mining and oceanography using islands as research centres; impact assessment of islands on maritime policy; role of islands in maritime policy;
- trade in goods and services: best practices of niche trade; adaptation of policy conducive to niche trade on islands; open laboratories for economic and social development in islands;
- tourism: accessibility; specificities of the tourism nature and impacts of tourism;
- water management: policy with specific characteristics unique to islands; and
- education, training and lifelong learning.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Smart islands \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Towards a thriving data-driven economy

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**Rapporteur:** Anna Katarzyna Nietyksza

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

This Communication describes the features of the data-driven economy of the future and sets out operational conclusions to support and accelerate the transition towards it. It also sets out current and future activities in the field of cloud computing. The Commission considers that only a coordinated action plan involving Member States and the EU can guarantee the necessary scope and scale of the required activities.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC welcomes the Commission's communication, which calls for the establishment in the European Union of a thriving data-driven economy and thus a digital economy using information technologies.

The EESC stresses that the broad dissemination of information technologies in all areas of society and the economy, culture and education will provide enormous development opportunities, but it is necessary to support IT-related research and development in the technical, economic and social sciences.

The EESC regrets the substantial reduction in funding for the financing of digital infrastructure under the Connecting Europe Facility and strongly advocates drawing appropriate conclusions. A new investment plan presented by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in December 2014, aimed at mobilising at least EUR 315 billion in the form of additional public and private investment in key areas such as digital infrastructure, is in this context a welcome policy response.

Finally, the EESC stresses that, in order to protect data and information security, cooperation is needed between national and European level public administrations and electronic communications regulatory bodies and consumer and competition bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2014\) 442 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Towards a thriving data-driven economy](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Towards a thriving data-driven economy](#)

## Interoperability as a means for modernising the public sector

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**Rapporteur:** Stuart Etherington

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

On 24 and 25 October 2013, the European Council adopted conclusions stressing that the modernisation of public administrations should continue, with the swift implementation of services, such as e-government, e-health, e-invoicing and e-procurement that rely on interoperability. Member States are gradually modernising their administrations by improving business processes and ICT infrastructures, thereby reducing their administrative burden and costs. However, because it takes place at national level and lacks European-level interoperability, the current proposal for the continuation of the Commission's interoperability programme will be therefore a contribution to both the modernisation of European public administrations and the completion of the digital single market.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The Committee welcomes the proposal for a new programme on interoperability solutions for European public administrations, civil society and citizens ("ISA<sup>2</sup>").

However, the proposal does not mention public trust and confidence in public administrations and their ability to manage personal data, nor does it note any other risks or disbenefits to interoperability. It should also take into account any concerns that the European Data Protection Supervisor may have regarding the processing of personal data in more than one Member State.

Finally, the Committee recommends that:

- a robust Citizens' Summary should be developed in order to address concerns about value for money and to justify the social benefits claimed by the programme;
- the Commission may need to satisfy itself that the "incubator" and "solution bridge" activities will not distort the market and have the effect of reducing commercial supply of interoperability ICT solutions;
- every IT solution must be compatible with the Universal Character Set (UCS).

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2014\) 367 final - Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a programme on interoperability solutions for European public administrations, businesses and citizens \(ISA2\) Interoperability as a means for modernising the public sector - 2014/0185 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a programme on interoperability solutions for European public administrations, businesses and citizens \(ISA2\) Interoperability as a means for modernising the public sector](#)

## Digital transformation: health and care

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**Rapporteur:** Diego Dutto

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The organisation and delivery of health and social care are the responsibility of the Member States. Nevertheless, the European Commission can promote public health and the prevention of disease and support cooperation between the Member States, for example, to improve the complementarity of their health services cross-border. The Commission can also take action to stimulate innovation, economic growth and the development of the Single Market in close coordination with Member States.

The present Communication proposes to build the necessary cooperation and infrastructure across the EU to promote health, prevent and control disease, help address patients' unmet needs and make it easier for citizens to have equal access to high quality care through the meaningful use of digital innovations. It will also strengthen the resilience and sustainability of Europe's health and care systems. The proposed actions also aim to stimulate growth and promote the European industry in the domain.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC believes that:

- in the course of the changes generated by digital transformation, people must be at the centre of care;
- digitalisation processes must help healthcare professionals to spend more time with patients; healthcare professions must be staffed with qualified personnel and equipped with appropriate digital skills;
- digital tools must be a lever to develop new forms of organisation in health and care systems. By means of appropriate public investment, values of solidarity and universality must be reaffirmed as the basis of these systems;
- digitalisation processes are not to be misinterpreted as a savings package for health care budgets. Care must be considered as a personal service and new concepts of long-term care need to be developed.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 233 final Communication from the Commission – enabling the digital transformation of health and care in the Digital Single Market; empowering citizens and building a healthier society](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on enabling the digital transformation of health and care in the Digital Single Market; empowering citizens and building a healthier society'](#)

# Artificial Intelligence for Europe

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**Rapporteur:** Giuseppe Guerini

## Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

In May 2017 the Commission published its mid-term review of the Digital Single Market Strategy. The Communication presents a European AI initiative, proposing a three-pronged approach: 1) boosting the EU's technological and industrial capacity and AI uptake across all economic sectors (investment in research and innovation, better access to data); 2) preparing for socio-economic changes brought about by AI (encouraging the modernisation of education and training systems, anticipating changes in the labour market, adapting social protection systems); 3) ensuring an appropriate ethical and legal framework (drawing up AI ethics guidelines).

## Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC believes that artificial intelligence ("AI") and automation processes have enormous potential to improve European society in terms of innovation and positive transformation, but they also pose significant challenges, risks and concerns. The EESC would like to work closely with the EU institutions in the analysis and evaluation of all the EU legislation on liability, product safety and civil responsibility, which should be amended as a result.

The EESC agrees with the aim of the Commission Communication to strengthen the EU's industrial and technological capacity in order to spread AI across the internal market. The EESC thinks that addressing the challenge of global competitiveness requires AI to be accessible to as many entities as possible.

The EESC believes that the European Commission and the Member States should work together to develop guidelines on artificial intelligence ethics and should involve all the relevant public and private stakeholders in this effort. The EESC suggests that a clear, harmonised and mandatory legal framework be developed at the European level to duly regulate AI and to update the existing rules affected by AI.

The EESC highlights the role of educational training programmes in protecting European workers operating in an environment that is being profoundly changed by the gradual emergence of AI. The EESC recommends that, when setting up the European Alliance for AI, the European Commission should take into account the need to create an inclusive, multi-professional and representative platform for the different stakeholders representing European citizens, including the representatives of workers, who will have to interact with smart machines.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 237 final Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Artificial Intelligence for Europe](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Artificial Intelligence for Europe'](#)



# Trust, privacy and security for consumers and businesses in the Internet of Things (IoT)

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**Rapporteur:** Carlos Trías Pinto

## Background

By 2025 it is estimated that there will be 75 billion connected devices. However, their use also entails risks, such as the permanent surveillance of citizens; risks associated with ethical dilemmas or civil liability. As a result, when it comes to the Internet of Things (IoT), consumer organisations are urging authorities to enforce people's rights as consumers as well as their privacy and security. This is so that the benefits of IoT applications can overcome the numerous challenges present in 21st-century society, challenges that affect institutions, regulators, manufacturers and developers alike.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC calls on the European institutions and EU Member States to:

- ensure that security and privacy are protection by building appropriate regulatory frameworks that contain strict monitoring and control provisions;
- clearly define the liability of all operators in the product supply chain and the related information flows, preventing legal loopholes occurring when several producers and distributors are involved at the same time;
- introduce appropriate resources and effective coordination mechanisms between the European Commission and the Member States;
- monitor the development of emerging technologies associated with IoT, to guarantee high security, full transparency and fair accessibility;
- promote European and international standardisation in order to guarantee product reliability, availability, resilience and continuation;
- monitor the markets and protect a level playing field for the IoT's implementation;
- undertake to promote awareness-raising and digital capacity-building initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Trust, privacy and security for consumers and businesses in the internet of Things \(IoT\)' \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment

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**Rapporteur:** Victor Alistar

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

Fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment (including payment cards) is a threat to security, as it represents a source of income for organised crime and is also an obstacle to the digital single market.

This proposal has identified three specific objectives that address the problems identified: ensuring that a clear, robust and technology neutral policy/legal framework is in place; eliminating operational obstacles that hamper investigation and prosecution; enhancing prevention.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC:

- welcomes the Commission's initiative to prioritise the fight against cybercrime, as it aims to protect Europeans and businesses from cybercrime networks, and includes measures to boost confidence in the use of electronic payment instruments;
- is of the view that the benefits of digitisation must be flanked by mechanisms able to meet the accompanying challenges, so that the European economy and Europeans can enjoy the information society to the full;
- finds that a number of shortcomings need to be addressed and corrected in Articles 11, 12, 13 and 16 (settling conflicts of jurisdiction, exchange of best practice, specific measures on prevention to provide information, reinforcement of Article 16);
- is of the opinion that it is important to establish deterrents and mechanisms to inform the public about the modus operandi of offenders as well, through awareness-raising campaigns conducted by law enforcement authorities in the Member States.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017\) 489 final Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/413/JHA](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/413/JHA'](#)

## Mid-term review: A Connected Digital Single Market for All

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**Rapporteur:** Antonio Longo

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The goal of the Digital Single Market has been to provide trust, which is essential for business and consumer confidence by providing a clear and stable legal environment. In the two years since the adoption of the strategy, the Commission has made proposals on all the 16 key measures identified, focusing on areas where the EU can bring specific added value. The Commission calls for all parties to ensure that the measures proposed are rapidly adopted and implemented to allow people and businesses in the EU to fully benefit from a functional Digital Single Market.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC supports the Commission's proposals but voices its concern at delays in the adoption and implementation of the 35 actions and legislative initiatives submitted. It also stresses the need to strengthen the social dimension of the digital single market strategy and hopes the EU will launch a major plan for digital education and training, providing everyone with the cognitive tools they need to cope with the transition.

In the EESC's view, social dialogue can play a key role in this process and it calls on the Commission, together with the social partners, to set the ball rolling by exploring the medium- and long-term prospects and identifying robust strategies to guarantee decent wages, good jobs, a sound work-life balance and widespread access to social security.

The Committee reaffirms that internet access is a fundamental right for everyone and calls on the Commission to speed up implementation of the e-Government and e-health strategies. Also, SMEs should be given more help with support for companies that includes an ad hoc strategy for start-ups. The Commission should bolster consumer rights protection across the EU, while ensuring that harmonising legislation does not result in lower standards of protection. The Committee also considers cybersecurity a priority for European sovereignty and competitiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017\) 228 final Commission Communication on the Mid-Term Review on the implementation of the Digital Single Market Strategy - A Connected Digital Single Market for All](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the mid-term review on the implementation of the digital single market strategy — A connected digital single market for all'](#)

## Copyright and Accessibility

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**Rapporteur:** Pedro Almeida Freire

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

As a key part of its Digital Single Market strategy, the Commission has adopted a package of modern EU copyright rules. The Commission is proposing a Regulation to implement the Marrakesh Treaty to facilitate access to published works for persons who are blind, have other visual impairments or are otherwise print disabled. These measures are important to ensure that copyright does not constitute a barrier to the full participation in society of all citizens and will allow for the exchange of accessible format copies within the EU and with third countries that are parties to the Treaty, avoiding duplication of work and waste of resources.

Even though the draft Regulation has already been adopted by the Commission on 14 September 2016, the Council decided on 5 April 2017 to consult the EESC on the presidency compromise proposal of the Commission proposal. In this compromise proposal the Presidency suggests the change of the legal basis from Article 207 TFEU to Article 114 TFEU thus making the consultation of the EESC by the Council mandatory.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC:

- agrees with the compromise proposed by the Presidency which makes a swift ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty possible;
- expects a quick implementation by the EU of the Marrakesh Treaty which is important and necessary for enabling many European citizens who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print-disabled to access more accessible works and thus open the door for them to culture, education and employment, hence ensuring effective social inclusion;
- supports the proposed Regulation and the proposed Directive to implement the Marrakesh Treaty as they will establish a mandatory exception and ensure the making and exchange of such accessible format copies within the Single Market as well as outside of the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 595 final Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the cross-border exchange between the Union and third countries of accessible format copies of certain works and other subject-matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the cross-border exchange between the Union and third countries of accessible format copies of certain works and other subject-matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled'](#)

# Impact of the digital healthcare revolution on health insurance

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**Rapporteur:** Alain Coheur

## Background

The digital revolution is bringing about profound changes in the way we understand health in terms of prevention, education, compliance, coordination of healthcare while enhancing the efficiency of the healthcare system. Given that every European citizen is insured through their healthcare and health insurance system and that they have access to functioning healthcare services, the digital healthcare revolution will affect their relationship both with medical professionals and with their health insurer. The own-initiative opinion should demonstrate the potential of the digital revolution in healthcare, without underestimating its positive or negative effects on the way healthcare and health insurance are organised.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC believes that equal access to healthcare, one of the main objectives of health policies, can benefit from digital support provided certain conditions are met: equal geographical coverage; bridging the digital divide in terms of use by the public, health professionals and stakeholders in health insurance schemes; interoperability among the various components of the digital architecture; and protection of health data which must under no circumstances be used to the detriment of patients.

The EESC also highlights the need to:

- develop and facilitate people's digital health literacy to encourage a critical approach to health information;
- guarantee good quality information in the field of health, particularly by encouraging labelling/accreditation procedures for health applications;
- bolster the relationship of trust between patients, health professionals and stakeholders in health insurance schemes;
- introduce a training system suited to health service users and health professionals alike;
- support the development of a nomenclature of reimbursable treatments and wellbeing services by taking account of technical innovations made possible by digitisation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Impact of the digital healthcare revolution on health insurance \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

# Artificial intelligence

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**Rapporteur:** Catelijne Muller

## Background

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is part of, but goes beyond, digitalisation and robotisation. It could have great potential for the economy as well as people. However, like any transformative technology, AI also carries risks and presents complex policy challenges.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

As AI can have both a positive and a negative impact on society, the EESC has undertaken to closely monitor developments surrounding AI, not only from a technical perspective but also from an ethical, safety and societal perspective. As the representative of European civil society, the EESC will shape, focus and promote public debate on AI, involving all relevant stakeholders.

The EESC recommends that the EU take the lead globally in establishing clear global policy frameworks for AI, in line with European values and fundamental rights. The EESC currently identifies 11 areas where AI poses societal challenges: ethics; safety; privacy; transparency and accountability; work; education and skills; (in)equality and inclusiveness; law and regulations; governance and democracy; warfare; superintelligence.

The EESC advocates a "human in command" approach to AI and calls for the establishment of a code of ethics for the development, deployment and use of AI. It also calls for a standardisation system for verifying, validating and monitoring AI systems, as well as for a European AI infrastructure.

The EESC feels that the EU, national governments and social partners should jointly identify which sectors of the labour market will be influenced by AI. It recommends that stakeholders work together on complementary AI systems and their co-creation in the workplace.

The EESC considers that a detailed evaluation of EU laws and regulations is needed. The EESC opposes the introduction of a form of legal personality for robots or AI. The EESC feels that the development of AI applications that benefit society should be actively supported. Finally, the EESC supports the call by Human Rights Watch and others for a ban on autonomous weapon systems.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Artificial intelligence – The consequences of artificial intelligence on the \(digital\) single market, production, consumption, employment and society \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Copyright package

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**Rapporteur:** Juan Mendoza Castro

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

As a key part of its Digital Single Market strategy, the Commission has adopted a package of modern EU copyright rules.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC:

- stresses that regulating copyright must serve to strike a balance between the rights of all these parties, avoiding bureaucracy and unnecessary requirements;
- stresses that swift ratification by the EU of the Marrakesh Treaty on copyright in relation to the blind is important and necessary;
- suggests a number of amendments e.g. on text and data mining or copies of works for the preservation of cultural heritage to adjust copyright more closely to current requirements;
- refers to the ECJ judgement stating that, under certain conditions, the lending of a digital copy of a book has similar characteristics to the lending of printed works;
- urges that "freedom of panorama" exception should be harmonised by European rules;
- supports the exclusive related right of publishers to authorise or prohibit the digital use of their press publications for a period of twenty years;
- welcomes that authors are entitled to fair remuneration for their creative endeavours, to be associated with the commercial success of their works and to benefit from a high level of protection and funding of works.

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<sup>1</sup> a) [Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on copyright in the Digital Single Market](#); b) [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down rules on the exercise of copyright and related rights applicable to certain online transmissions of broadcasting organisations and retransmissions of television and radio programmes](#); c) [Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain permitted uses of works and other subject-matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled and amending Directive 2001/29/EC on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society](#) : a) COM(2016) 593 final – 2016/0280 (COD); b) COM(2016) 594 final – 2016/0284 (COD); c) COM(2016) 596 final – 2016/0278 (COD).

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee](#) on the 'Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on copyright in the Digital Single Market' (COM(2016) 593 final — 2016/0280 (COD)), on the 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down rules on the exercise of copyright and related rights applicable to certain online transmissions of broadcasting organisations and retransmissions of television and radio programmes' (COM(2016) 594 final — 2016/0284 (COD)) and on the 'Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain permitted uses of works and other subject-matter protected by copyright and related rights for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled and amending Directive 2001/29/EC on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society'.

## Parcel delivery services

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**Rapporteur:** Raymond Hencks

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The proposed Regulation will increase price transparency and regulatory oversight of cross-border parcel delivery services so that consumers and retailers can benefit from affordable deliveries and convenient return options even to and from peripheral regions.

The regulation will foster competition by introducing greater price transparency. The Commission will take stock of progress made in 2019 and assess if further measures are necessary.

The Regulation will give national postal regulators the data they need to monitor cross-border markets and check the affordability and cost-orientation of prices.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC:

- recognises that it is now essential that the Commission takes further action to ensure that all e-retailers and consumers, and particularly individuals and SMEs in remote areas, can finally benefit from cross-border parcel delivery services that are accessible, high quality and affordable;
- fears that the proposed measures not be enough and do little to encourage the cross-border parcel delivery services concerned to charge reasonable tariffs;
- regrets that the Commission is shelving any more stringent measures until the end of 2018 as it waits to see whether the situation has improved by then;
- calls on the Commission to take the same approach it took to roaming charges in mobile communications, and, at the very least, make a final urgent appeal to all cross-border parcel delivery services to lower their tariffs, and announce now that, if that does not happen, it will intervene by means of a regulation and a cap on tariffs;
- has been calling for clarification of the concept of affordable services of general economic interest and for legislative measures to be introduced requiring Member States to define indicators to establish the affordability of these services.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 285 final Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on cross-border parcel delivery services](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on cross-border parcel delivery services'](#)



## Unjustified geo-blocking

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**Rapporteur:** Joost van Iersel

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The Digital Single Market Strategy adopted in May 2015 and the Single Market Strategy adopted in October 2015 announced legislative action to address unjustified geo-blocking and comprehensively fight discrimination based on nationality or place of residence or establishment. Companies and online retailers apply barriers and impose restrictions to consumers on the basis of their nationality or place of residence. As a consequence, geo-blocking and other geographically-based restrictions undermine online shopping and cross-border sales.

The proposal for a regulation from the European Commission defines specific situations when there can be no justified reasons for geo-blocking or other discriminations based on nationality, residence or location. The proposal also provides for a non-discrimination rule in payments. While traders remain free to offer whatever payment means they want, the proposal includes a specific provision on non-discrimination within those payment means.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC considers the proposal from the Commission as a welcomed step further in the creation of a Digital Single Market, but not as a game-changer.

The EESC urges the Commission to put forward ambitious and well-defined proposals for an ambitious Digital Single Market in favour of consumers and companies. The Committee also underlines that justified geo-blocking resulting from different Member States' industrial policies and diverging legislation is also damaging the development of SMEs and scale-ups operating in Europe.

Finally, the Committee points that the EU should focus equally on the remaining obstacles in the Single Market that discourage or hamper traders from selling on-line and/or off-line across borders.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 289 final Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on addressing geo-blocking and other forms of discrimination based on customers' nationality, place of residence or place of establishment within the internal market and amending Regulation \(EC\) No 2006/2004 and Directive 2009/22/EC](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on addressing geo-blocking and other forms of discrimination based on customers' nationality, place of residence or place of establishment within the internal market and amending Regulation \(EC\) No 2006/2004 and Directive 2009/22/EC'](#)

## Collaborative economy

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**Rapporteur:** Carlos Trias Pintó

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this Communication is to help reap the benefits of the Collaborative Economy and to address concerns over the uncertainty about rights and obligations of stakeholders. It provides legal guidance and policy orientation and addresses the following key issues: market access requirements; liability regimes; protection of users; self-employed and workers in the collaborative economy; taxation.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

Faced with the new paradigm of a decentralised digital economy, the EESC is of the view that it should be ensured that this is not accompanied by job insecurity and tax avoidance, and that the value added does not massively shift away from industrial players towards the owners of proprietary digital platforms. The Committee therefore encourages the Commission to develop a more detailed and inclusive conceptual approach to the collaborative economy, an economic model which embraces a democratic and participatory dynamic similar to that of the social economy. It also calls on the Commission to pay attention to digital platforms, in order to regulate and harmonise their activity and ensure a level playing field on the basis of transparency, information, full access, non-discrimination and appropriate use of data

Moreover, the EESC calls for the development of a specific methodology for regulating and measuring a new economy with different standards, with the value of trust playing a central role. An independent European rating agency for digital platforms should be created, with harmonized competences in competition, employment and taxation in all Member States.

The opinion also notes that the Communication ignores virtual and social currencies as operational instruments of the collaborative economy, as well as knowledge, information and energy as objects of its practice, and the role of co-creation and technological innovation.

In order to tackle the transition to a new economy with significant systemic consequences, it is recommended that the EESC create a permanent horizontal structure to analyse these emerging phenomena.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 356 final Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — A European Agenda for the Collaborative Economy](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — A European agenda for the collaborative economy'](#)

## Sharing economy and self-regulation

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**Rapporteur:** Jorge Pegado Liz

### Background

Based on the Internet and various new information resources, the sharing economy has rapidly developed and grown. The collaborative "sharing economy" tends to occupy an important role in EU economic activity, stimulating new consumption, raising productivity and catalysing individual innovation and entrepreneurship. However, for a number of authors and stakeholders there's a real danger that today's misalignment between these peer-to-peer business models and old legislations will impede economic growth. Would self-regulation be an alternative by introducing some "order" in the market while keeping flexibility as it was the case in other markets and industries?

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The Opinion presents a list of characteristics which make it possible to define the sharing economy model and to distinguish between genuine practices and those that are sometimes wrongly described as such merely to get around regulations that should apply to them. It also highlights the social and environmental dimensions of the sharing economy.

The EESC urges the Commission to undertake measures in order to ensure that the sharing economy is supported, implemented, and gains credibility and trust. New business models need to comply with the applicable national and EU legislation, with respect to workers' rights, appropriate taxation, data protection and the privacy of stakeholders, social rights, fair competition and the fight against monopolies and anti-competitive practices, the accountability of platforms in the context of transactions between the partners and the legality of their dealings. The rights of all partners operating in the sharing economy must be protected by adapting these relations across the existing EU acquis on consumer rights, with particular reference to unfair contractual terms, unfair commercial practices, health and safety and e-commerce.

The EU must urgently define a clear and transparent legal framework within which these activities should be developed and implemented in the European area. The Committee calls on the Commission to publish without delay the 'European agenda for the collaborative economy'. This agenda should provide a clear definition of the complementary role that self- and co-regulation must play in the sharing economy.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Sharing economy and self-regulation' \(exploratory opinion requested by the Dutch presidency\)](#)

## Portability of online content services

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**Rapporteur:** Bernardo Hernández Bataller

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The proposal aims to facilitate the provision of the cross-border portability of online content services and imposes an obligation, under certain conditions, on the service provider to enable cross-border portability. It does not substantially affect the licensing of rights and therefore has a limited effect on the business models of right holders and service providers. The proposal will not oblige right holders and service providers to renegotiate contracts as it will make unenforceable any provisions in contracts contrary to the obligation to provide for cross-border portability. Moreover, the proposal does not impose on service providers any disproportionate cost. The proposal would not require that the provider of online content services takes any measures to ensure the quality of delivery of such services outside the Member State of residence of the subscriber.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC:

- welcomes the Commission's initiative to address "cross-border portability" through a regulation;
- considers it necessary for a subscriber's "Member State of residence" to be clearly defined in order to ensure that the other Member States can be identified by default as countries where the subscriber is temporarily present;
- considers that where users qualify as customers or subscribers to a service and are shown to be linked to a Member State and identified by their IP address or internet connection or other equivalent indicator, this should ensure cross-border portability;
- believes that the portability of these services should be guaranteed if the Member State is "verifiable", provided that it can be verified without incurring additional costs for the provider;
- considers that legal provisions should explicitly state that any loss or deterioration in delivery affecting the range of services available, accessibility on devices and the number of users would constitute non-compliance.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2015\) 627 final Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on ensuring the cross-border portability of online content services in the internal market](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on ensuring the cross-border portability of online content services in the internal market](#)

## Digital contract rights

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**Rapporteur:** Jorge Pegado Liz

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

To deliver the right conditions to enable cross-border e-commerce to flourish, the Commission adopted: a proposal for a Directive on certain aspects concerning contracts for the supply of digital content; and a proposal for a Directive on certain aspects concerning contracts for the online and other distance sales of goods.

In essence, the two directives will fully harmonise in a targeted way the key mandatory rights and obligations of the parties to a contract for the supply of digital content and the online sales of goods and will also contribute to faster growth of the Digital Single Market.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC agrees that a number of the matters raised in the Communication on Digital contract rights need to be regulated but considers that other factors, which it identifies in this opinion on digital content and online sales of goods, are far more important than contractual rights in contracts for the online sale of tangible goods.

In principle, consistent with its previous positions, the EESC is in favour of a regulation instead of a directive and disagrees with the legal basis chosen by the Commission. The Committee proposes Article 169 TFEU instead; consequently, it proposes that the measures adopted should be based on minimum harmonisation.

However, in the case of the Proposal for the supply of digital content, for pragmatic reasons, it accepts the Commission's suggestion of targeted full harmonisation even though it believes that insufficient reasons are given for taking this.

Furthermore, the EESC is of the view that, because the Commission's proposal for the sale of online goods establishes two systems, an unacceptable difference is created in the treatment of online and offline sales of goods.

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<sup>1</sup> [\(a\) Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain aspects concerning contracts for the supply of digital content, and \(b\) Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain aspects concerning contracts for the online and other distance sales of goods - \(a\) COM\(2015\) 634 final – 2015/0287 \(COD\)\(b\) COM\(2015\) 635 final – 2015/0288 \(COD\).](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain aspects concerning contracts for the supply of digital content' \(COM\(2015\) 634 final — 2015/0287 \(COD\)\) and the 'Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on certain aspects concerning contracts for the online and other distance sales of goods'](#)

## Modernisation of copyright rules

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**Rapporteur:** Denis Meynent

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The Communication aims to achieve a wide availability of creative content across the EU, to make sure that EU copyright rules continue to provide a high level of protection for right holders, and to maintain a good balance with other public policy goals in the digital environment. It presents a plan that includes targeted actions with proposals for the very short term, including a proposal on the 'portability' of online content services presented together with this Communication, a set of proposals planned for 2016, and a long-term vision.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC:

- believes that copyright remains a fundamentally important way to protect and fairly pay authors and those involved in disseminating works and performances via interconnected digital networks;
- calls for the Marrakesh Treaty to be swiftly ratified;
- is of the view that a united European position on private copying is possible and desirable;
- calls for a new legal context to promote the creation of copyright-protected work and, simultaneously, to enhance the contribution of new types of licence and new business models to building the European single market;
- considers a regulation to be the best instrument for establishing the digital single market;
- encourages the Commission to conduct studies and in-depth research on business models linked to free licences, on their current and potential economic importance, on the revenue and jobs they could create in various fields, and on any legal proposals that would enhance their profile and use;
- believes that Europe's cultural diversity is at the heart of European identity and should be fostered and promoted among the Member States.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2015\) 626 final Commission Communication – Towards a modern, more European copyright framework](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Towards a modern, more European copyright framework](#)

## Strategy for the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights in third countries

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**Rapporteur:** Jacques Lemerrier

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The Commission's new communication aims to revise the strategy launched in 2004. The Commission is proposing a new approach aimed at enhancing the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) in third countries.

Many sectors in the EU are still suffering the consequences of the failure to protect and uphold IPR in third countries. The new strategy aims to reduce the number of cases of infringements affecting the EU's external trade, such as counterfeiting, piracy or inadequate implementation of international agreements. This approach with regard to third countries can be justified by the impact of IPR infringements on employment, innovation and growth within the EU.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC acknowledges that the new approach, based on the specific needs and penalties in force in third countries, is balanced. It nevertheless notes the need to give consideration to the challenges facing local populations in developing countries.

The Committee emphasises the need to improve information and awareness raising campaigns in the EU and in third countries on the subject of IPR. For this reason, special attention must be given to public authorities and administrative bodies in third countries, to IPR holders, economic sectors and NGOs in the EU, and also to the European institutions, first and foremost the Member States and the European Parliament.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2014\) 389 COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION on Trade, growth and intellectual property - Strategy for the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights in third countries](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Strategy for the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights in third countries](#)

## Industrial policy towards 2030

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**Rapporteur:** Carlos Trias Pinto

**Co-rapporteur:** Gerald Kreuzer

### Background

In an increasingly globalised setting, Europe has opted to boost its competitiveness by enhancing the quality of its products and services, implementing a strategy of differentiation by regions and industrial sectors with the aim of generating growth and employment by creativity and smart design, social innovation and the fostering of new sustainable, inclusive industrial models. This opinion explores the current challenges for European industry and the possible driving lines to guide the European Commission to design a new approach to a real Industrial Policy for the coming decade.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The opinion pleads for an holistic approach to reconcile growth, climate, environmental challenges and societal problems in a fair transition design. It underlines that Europe's renaissance (rEUnaissance) means a fully fledged master plan for European industry, mainstreaming industrial policy across all EU policies, enabling industry to transform and generating industrial added value through creativity and smart design, social innovation and fostering new sustainable and inclusive industrial models.

The EU Strategy should recognise the importance of value chains and addresses ambitious measures to develop these further. Rather than focusing on individual sectors, the Strategy should ensure attractive operating conditions in Europe.

Improvements in education and training for new jobs and services should also be closely interlinked with R+D+i policies and with the creation of work-based learning, extending Skills Agenda to key industry sectors.

To make the whole industrial value chain more sustainable, the EESC firmly supports the Commission's road map on financing sustainable growth, building a sustainable finance taxonomy that reorients responsible savings to sustainable investments and enhancing the European Strategic Investment.

It strongly supports the golden rule on public investment, not only in co-financing the strategic investment projects but also in all sustainable investment projects in relation to the positive progress of the unified EU classification system for sustainable activities (taxonomy).

Regarding EU Free Trade Agreements, sustainability chapters in FTA's must promote implementation of ILO labour standards and the UN Principles on Business and Human Rights. An enlarged social dialogue at different levels is necessary to properly analyse and provide joint responses to global value chains in sustainable companies.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Strategic developments in industrial policy by 2030, with a view to strengthening the competitiveness and diversity of the industrial base in Europe and focusing on long-term performance within global value chains' \(exploratory opinion requested by the Austrian Presidency\)](#)



## Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable industry

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**Rapporteur:** Bojidar Danev

**Co-rapporteur:** Monika Šitarová Hrušecká

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

Europe is the global leader in many industries. However, major efforts are needed to adjust to the challenges and reap the vast opportunities of the new industrial age. Automation, enabled by information technologies, is transforming traditional manufacturing processes and the nature of work. Industry is increasingly integrated in global value chains with strong service components. Emerging business models disrupt traditional markets.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

**The EESC's recommendations are as follows:**

- European action needs to develop a well-functioning toolbox of horizontal policies and a predictable legal framework.
- The Digital Market strategy must be implemented urgently, accompanied by a focused employment policy.
- An open and realistic attitude should be adopted towards new business models.
- Flexible pathways are needed between work and education.
- Leadership in low-carbon and circular economies should benefit our economies.
- Obstacles to turning present, big private savings surpluses into productive investments in industry and infrastructure should be explored.
- EU support should mainly be directed at boosting innovation, scaling up SMEs, helping regions in trouble and empowering people.
- R&D and innovation policies must be guaranteed additional resources in the next financial framework.
- Official statistics should better reflect the changed features of the economy, such as the blurring of sectoral borders and new forms of economic activity. A common method of calculating value added from industry and services is needed.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017\) 479 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank: Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable Industry Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable Industry - A renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank: Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable Industry — A renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy'](#)

## Industrial change in the health sector

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**Rapporteur:** Joost van Iersel

**Co-rapporteur:** Enrico Gibellieri

### Background

The health sector – notably e-Health – is probably Europe's fastest growing sector. The issue concerns the rapid transition of a traditional industry into a sector that is also profoundly affected by digitalisation and Industry 4.0.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

#### Recommendations

- The European institutions should foster economic performance, innovation, digitalisation and effective public procurement, while facilitating cross-border trade in medical devices and industrial products.
- An EU industrial policy must build upon shared national and EU competences in the framework of Article 168 TFEU. EU innovation policies should be supportive.
- Free flow of (big) data across the Union should be promoted, respecting patient privacy and security.
- The Commission should ensure effective public procurement across the Union.
- Within the broader context of national approaches, there are many region-based initiatives. The Commission should promote exchange of successful experiences. Bilateral contacts between public and private health authorities must be encouraged.
- The European Semester and country-specific recommendations should also examine the effect of technological change on the transformation of health systems.
- The Commission must seek efficient internal coordination. It should foster dialogues and platforms between universities, local authorities, the social partners and the medical technological industry. These can be exemplary for close cooperation between public actors such as national health, finance and industry ministries, and the private sector.
- The human factor is paramount. The transition to new health and care requires an open mind and new forms of professionalism in industry at all levels, as well as a redesign of health and care related work. The European social dialogue in health and social services that is in place since 2006 should be reinforced in view of adequate education and training programmes as well as to upgrade the quality of working conditions and work places.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Industrial Changes in the European Pharmaceutical Sector'](#)

## Digitalisation in the European financial sector

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Rapporteur: Carlos Trias Pintó

Co-rapporteur: Pierre Gendre

### Background

Banking and insurance are evolving. Insurance companies and banks are at the forefront of the development of the digital economy. The rise of new technologies, changing consumer habits and regulatory requirements are pushing the financial sector to transform its business models to adapt to new market trends.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

There is definitely a need to restore trust and stability in the financial sector, with the management of the transition from the old banking system to the new system being crucial. The EESC calls for the appropriate legislation to be put in place in the EU context of an integrative process of the Banking Union and the Digital Single Market, allowing for growth and innovation while also ensuring protection for consumers and employees in the finance industry.

To achieve a truly Single European Financial Market, European Commission policy should support a level playing field in terms of innovation. Broadly analogous conditions are needed in terms of working conditions and supervisory obligations, both for the traditional finance industry and FinTech companies. A risk-based approach to regulation should be consistent throughout the innovation lifecycle, providing a proportional and simplified regulatory framework.

Digitalisation in the financial sector threatens many jobs, and this is forcing employees to update their competences and skills. The EESC advocates ensuring that skills training and further education take place on two levels. Internally, by allowing employees to take on new tasks, and externally by preparing employees who cannot remain in the sector for jobs in other sectors.

The EESC calls on the European Social Fund to provide specific training programmes within the new flagship initiative "Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition", to support the up-skilling and retraining of the financial sector's workforce to prepare them for new digital technologies.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Digitalisation and innovative business models in the European financial sector - impact on employment and customers' \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Industry 4.0

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**Rapporteur:** Joost van Iersel

**Co-rapporteur:** Nicola Konstantinou

### Background

The goal of this new own-initiative opinion is to update the European agenda on the basis of last year's EESC recommendations as well as specific current developments. Similarly, EU measures and conditions that enable industry to take full advantage of the strategic opportunities of 4.0 should be prioritised.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The Council, notably the Competitiveness Council, should, at the initiative of the EC, urgently decide on an EU 4.0 industrial strategy and a Digital Single Market (DSM), replacing the current fragmentation resulting from 28 digital policies. Cooperation is key. National and regional 4.0 Platforms must bring together all relevant actors. Partnerships of all kinds, synergies and clustering, cross-border arrangements and European benchmarking should be promoted.

The Communication is disappointingly concise on the considerable social consequences of digitalisation in industry. In order to avoid a split society, specific attention is needed for those generations and income groups that may be hard hit. For many others, there will be new opportunities. Digitalisation will have considerable consequences for the labour market and work organisation, such as greater income disparities and reduced access to social security systems, which can be prove negative if not properly countered.

The EESC expects an active role of the EC in: raising awareness in all parts of society; analysing the worldwide picture and providing improved statistical data on services; presenting effective EU coordination; increasing pressure on investments in infrastructure; ensuring that the implementation of the GDPR will not lead to disharmony in the EU market; pushing for transparent public and private financial arrangements; monitoring, benchmarking and evaluating; promoting 4.0 platforms and PPPs; promoting the Digital Innovation Hubs as centres for advanced training of the workforce; and deepening EU social dialogue at all levels to ensure protection for the entire workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Industry 4.0 and digital transformation: Where to go'](#)

# Taxation of profits of multinationals in the digital economy

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**Rapporteur:** Krister Andersson

**Co-rapporteur:** Petru Sorin Dandea

## Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

On 21 March 2018 the European Commission issued a legislative package to ensure that digital companies also contribute their fair share of tax. The current tax rules were not designed to cater for digital businesses which, nowadays, make up 9 of the world's top 20 companies by market capitalisation.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC believes that it is very important to develop new principles on how to attribute corporate profits to an EU country and tax them, in dialogue with trading partners, in order to avoid any escalation of trade and tax tensions between major economic players in the world.

The interim measure proposed by the Commission to tax certain digital services does not tax corporate profits but instead turnover. The EESC underlines that this approach is different from the global corporate tax system, which is based on the taxation of profits but it recognizes that for digital companies that do not have a physical presence, the country of sales will not receive corporate profit taxes. The Committee is concerned that such a shift in taxation will benefit larger economies with many consumers at the expense of smaller exporting economies. The EESC underlines that any solution, whether short or longer term, to the taxation of digital business models must result in a fair and equal economic outcome for all economies in the EU.

It underlines the need to take into account the changes in the tax codes going forward due to the implementation of Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) rules. It also notes that there is no sunset clause or other mechanism ensuring that the interim tax measure is withdrawn when a longer-term solution is found.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 0148 final - Proposal for a COUNCIL DIRECTIVE on the common system of a digital services tax on revenues resulting from the provision of certain digital services](#)  
[COM\(2018\) 147 final - Proposal for a COUNCIL DIRECTIVE laying down rules relating to the corporate taxation of a significant digital presence](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Proposal for a Council Directive laying down rules relating to the corporate taxation of a significant digital presence' and on 'Proposal for a Council Directive on the common system of a digital services tax on revenues resulting from the provision of certain digital services'](#)

## Financial Technology (Fin Tech)

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**Rapporteur:** Petru Sorin Dandea

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The Fin Tech Action Plan envisages enabling the financial sector to make use of the rapid advances in new technologies, such as blockchain, artificial intelligence and cloud services. At the same time, it seeks to make markets safer and easier to access for new players. This will benefit consumers, investors, banks and new market players alike. In addition, the Commission is proposing a pan-European label for platforms, so that a platform licensed in one country can operate across the EU.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The Committee supports the Commission's Fin Tech Action Plan and considers that the development of FinTech can deliver a number of benefits to both European businesses and their clients.

The Committee considers that the measures included in the action plan on improving cyber security and the resilience of the financial sector are important, but should be supplemented by rules to ensure uniformity in the development of FinTech in the EU. Similarly, the Committee believes that the level of regulation for FinTech should be equivalent to that in the financial sector, particularly as regards resilience and cyber security.

Given the high degree of volatility of crypto-assets and the significant risk that they can pose for clients, the EESC recommends that the Commission and Member States explore methods that should be established to supervise crypto-asset transactions.

The EESC furthermore recommends that the Member States design and implement active labour market measures enabling workers affected by the introduction of innovative technologies in the financial sector to take up a new job as soon as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 109 final COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS - FinTech action plan: for a more competitive and innovative European financial sector](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - FinTech action plan: for a more competitive and innovative European financial sector'](#)

## Digital Single Market VAT (e)-package

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**Rapporteur:** Amarjite Singh

### Gist of the Commission documents<sup>1</sup>

The European Commission is committed to ensuring the free movement of goods and services and to ensuring that "individuals and businesses can seamlessly access and exercise online activities under conditions of fair competition". These new rules will have a major effect for companies selling goods and services online that will be able to benefit from fairer rules, lower compliance costs and reduced administrative burdens. Those proposals would also help in making VAT future-proof.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC welcomes the package on the modernisation of VAT on cross-border e-commerce, and endorses both its objectives and its focus on addressing the concerns of SMEs. These proposed rules will have a major impact on companies selling goods and services online, allowing them to benefit from fairer rules, lower compliance costs, and a level playing field with non-EU companies.

The implementation of the VAT MOSS (Mini One Stop Shop) has had a significant impact on the reduction of compliance costs. It points out that SMEs have struggled with several compliance elements of the MOSS, and have expressed significant concerns. Therefore the Committee welcomes the fact that the proposed amendments to the MOSS address these concerns.

The EESC also welcomes the proposed extension of the MOSS to goods, as it creates conditions for the possible removal of the Low Value Consignment Relief (LVCR) scheme, which has created a distortion in competition, whereby businesses established outside the EU have a competitive advantage over those established within the EU.

The amendments to the VAT rates applicable to e-publications rules would eliminate the distinction between physical and non-physical publications, and ensure neutrality in this market. However, whilst welcoming the elimination of this competitive distortion, the EESC is mindful of the risk that such elimination carries for the VAT base.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 0755 final – Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION amending Regulation \(EU\) No 904/2010 on administrative cooperation and combating fraud in the field of value added tax](#), and [COM\(2016\) 0757 final - Proposal for a COUNCIL DIRECTIVE amending Directive 2006/112/EC and Directive 2009/132/EC as regards certain value added tax obligations for supplies of services and distance sales of goods](#), and [COM\(2016\) 0758 final – Proposal for a COUNCIL DIRECTIVE amending Directive 2006/112/EC, as regards rates value added tax applied to books, newspapers and periodicals](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposals for a Council Regulation concerning value added tax', and 'Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 2006/112/EC and Directive 2009/132/EC as regards certain value added tax obligations for supplies of services and distance sales of goods', and 'Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 2006/112/EC, as regards rates of value added tax applied to books, newspapers and periodicals'](#)

## Taxation of the collaborative economy

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**Rapporteur:** Giuseppe Guerini

**Co-rapporteur:** Krister Andersson

### Background

The sharing economy is increasing in volume and is growing constantly. However, the sharing economy sector raises a series of challenges for the European legislator, who is required to safeguard principles and rules designed to establish a clear, predictable and transparent legal framework.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC believes that the collaborative economy may offer a new opportunity for growth and development for the European Union, as it allows untapped resources to be mobilised and gives the initiative to individual people. However, given the particularly rapid nature of change in this sector, it is crucial for fiscal regulatory systems and tax regimes to be adapted in an intelligent and flexible way.

The EESC does not judge a new, specific tax system for collaborative economy businesses to be necessary. It does however consider it essential to step up cooperation and coordination between the Member States and the various internal Member State administrations involved. The EESC recommends that the tax system for the collaborative economy comply with the principle of neutrality (i.e. it must not interfere with market development), identifying appropriate tax mechanisms that are fair to the different types of business operating within the collaborative economy. The EESC advocates the rapid construction of a uniform, integrated European system that ensures common rules for the different Member States regarding the digital economy, in the light of the natural tendency for digital networks to operate in a cross-border setting.

The EESC calls on the European authorities to make every effort to establish channels of cooperation beyond Europe in order to lay down some ground rules for the digital economy. Moreover, the EESC considers that, in order to make the tax system simpler and, in particular, to make it easier to apply VAT, it could be helpful to test a "stable virtual organisation" in the increasingly cross-border and ever less territorially-bound environment in which the digital economy and the collaborative economy are developing.

The EESC also considers it important to point out that, in addition to an appropriate tax system, protection and respect must be guaranteed for: (i) consumer rights, (ii) privacy and the rules on processing personal data, and (iii) workers and service providers involved in the new business models and in the work of collaborative platforms.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Taxation of the collaborative economy - analysis of possible tax policies faced with the growth of the collaborative economy' \(exploratory opinion requested by the Estonian presidency\)](#)



## Promoting innovative and high growth firms

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**Rapporteur:** Antonio García del Riego

### Gist of the own-initiative opinion<sup>1</sup>

In order to facilitate business creation and growth, the EU and the Member States must improve the framework conditions for entrepreneurship in order to support the creation and growth of start-ups, including, but not limited to, regulatory environment, access to finance and Member States' insolvency laws that clearly disincentivize the assumption of commercial and financial risks.

Currently the situation in Europe is characterised, inter alia, by the following facts:

- Compared with the USA, the generation of start-ups in Europe is very weak.
- Once created, the ability of start-ups to attract venture capital or seed money funding in general to help them grow and develop is very low; several factors have fragmented the European market, for instance, uneven taxation and legislation which criminalises the administrator of bankrupt companies. 90% of the venture capital world is moving to USA whilst Europe attracts only 5%.
- Generally, start-ups are created around a cluster, mainly evolving around a university centre of excellence, which in turn attracts the infrastructure that feeds into and supports its creation. However, Europe has not been able to generate this environment of excellence despite having top universities.

Consequently, the European inability to generate start-ups has a negative impact on job creation, technological independence and attracting and retaining talent in Europe.

The objective of the opinion is to map Europe's challenges and opportunities in this area and analyse the reasons underlying Europe's failure to create an environment supportive of start-ups and for their growth, with the aim of formulating recommendations for policy makers on measures and actions needed to address the situation.

Successful policies focusing on start-ups would contribute towards boosting growth, lowering unemployment, attracting foreign investment and retaining talents in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Promoting innovative and high growth firms' \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy

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**Rapporteur:** Antonello Pezzini

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

Action on plastics was identified as a priority in the Circular Economy Action Plan. Better design of plastic products, higher plastic waste recycling rates, and more and better quality recyclates will help boosting the market for recycled plastics. Under the new plans, all plastic packaging on the EU market will be recyclable by 2030, the consumption of single-use plastics will be reduced and the intentional use of microplastics will be restricted.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC has supported the Commission's policy on the circular economy from the outset, but feels that it should be pursued in close collaboration with the social partners. National standardisation bodies should step up the process of using labelling to recognise secondary raw materials. European standardisation here will improve consumer safety.

The EESC feels that research and innovation should play a key role. Priority must be given to the process of digitally labelling the various types of plastics for the purpose of identification, separation and elimination. It is particularly important to ensure that these secondary raw materials contain none of the toxic substances which appear in raw materials not intended for use with food or in children's toys. The EESC considers that action must be taken by means of chemical analyses conducted under the REACH programme to curb microplastic pollution - one of the biggest dangers to the environment and health.

The EESC firmly supports the Commission's proposals to equip ports with facilities for the collection of waste and the requirements imposed on ship owners to comply with waste disposal procedures. A similar policy should also be applied to rivers. The EESC considers that fishing associations and the social partners should be involved in cleaning up polymer residue from seas and rivers and in raising awareness about river and marine waste.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 028 final - COMMUNICATION DE LA COMMISSION - COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION - A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy, and COM\(2018\) 33 final - Proposal for a Directive on port reception facilities for the delivery of waste from ships , repealing Directive 2000/59/EC and amending Directive 2009/16/EC and Directive 2010/65/EU](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Strategy on Plastic in a Circular Economy' \(communication including action on marine litter\)](#)



## Action Plan against Disinformation

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**Rapporteur:** Ulrich Samm

**Corapporteur:** Giulia Barbucci

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

Disinformation is a major challenge for European democracies and societies. The action plan sets out key actions to tackle disinformation in a coordinated approach of the Union institutions and the Member States based on four pillars: (i) improving the capabilities of Union institutions to detect, analyse and expose disinformation; (ii) strengthening coordinated and joint responses to disinformation; (iii) mobilising private sector to tackle disinformation; (iv) raising awareness and improving societal resilience.

The action plan also highlights measures to be taken as a matter of priority by different actors ahead of the 2019 European Parliament elections. Such measures also include: establishing a Rapid Alert System for addressing disinformation campaigns; organising targeted campaigns for the public and trainings for media and public opinion shapers in the Union and its neighbourhood; supporting the creation of teams of multi-disciplinary independent fact-checkers and researchers with specific knowledge of local information environments; and reinforcing the mandate of strategic communication task forces.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC welcomes the initiative for coordinated action to protect the EU, its institutions and its citizens against disinformation. The EESC emphasises the urgency of such measures but is also concerned, however, that the impact of this action plan might be limited given that the May 2019 European elections are not far off.

Building resilience means involving all sectors of society and, in particular, improving citizens' media literacy. Awareness-raising and critical thinking start at school but also require a continuous lifelong refresher.

The EESC welcomes the Code of Practice as a voluntary commitment for social media platforms and advertisers to fight disinformation, but at the same time has doubts about the effectiveness of such voluntary actions. The Commission is urged to propose further actions, including actions of a regulatory nature like penalties, should the implementation of the Code of Practice continue to be unsatisfactory.

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<sup>1</sup> [JOIN\(2018\) 36 final – Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Action Plan against Disinformation](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – "Action Plan against Disinformation"](#)

# European Cybersecurity Competence Centre

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**Rapporteur:** Antonio Longo

**Co-rapporteur:** Alberto Mazzola

## Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The European Commission proposes the creation of a European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and a Network of National Coordination Centres, with the aim of helping the Union to develop the cybersecurity technological and industrial capacities and increase the competitiveness of the Union's cybersecurity industry. The Centre should facilitate joint investment by the Union, Member States and industry. It will enhance cybersecurity capabilities, knowledge and infrastructure at the service of industries, the public sector and research communities.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) welcomes the Commission's initiative, considering it an important step in developing an industrial strategy for cybersecurity and a strategic move to achieve robust and comprehensive digital autonomy. These aspects are essential for strengthening Europe's defence mechanisms against the ongoing cyberwarfare that threatens to undermine its political, economic and social systems.

The EESC is in favour of extending the partnership to include the industry. In the event of a tripartite partnership between the European Commission, the Member States and the industry, the involvement of companies from non-EU countries should be limited to those that have long been established on European soil and are fully involved in the European technological and industrial base, and their involvement should be subject to proper screening and oversight mechanisms and to compliance with the principle of reciprocity and confidentiality obligations.

The Committee reiterates the importance of human capital and hopes that the Competence Centre can promote initiatives aimed at educating and training people to a standard of excellence, including through dedicated third-level and secondary-school courses. In the same vein, it is essential to provide for specific support for start-ups and SMEs.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 630 final – Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and the Network of National Coordination Centres: A contribution from the European Commission to the Leaders' meeting in Salzburg on 19-20 September 2018](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre and the Network of National Coordination Centres](#)

## Initiative addressing online platform challenges as regards the spreading of disinformation

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**Rapporteur:** Martin Siecker

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The cross-border dimension of online disinformation makes a European approach necessary in order to ensure effective and coordinated action and to protect the EU, its citizens, policies and institutions. This Communication presents a comprehensive approach that aims at responding to those serious threats by promoting digital ecosystems based on transparency and privileging high-quality information, empowering citizens against disinformation and protecting democracies and policy-making processes.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

A variety of tools and methods are currently used to undermine European values and external actions of the EU, as well as to develop and provoke separatist and nationalistic attitudes, manipulate the public and conduct direct interference in the domestic policy of sovereign countries and the EU as a whole. Moreover, the growing influence of cyber offensive capabilities and increased weaponisation of technologies to achieve political goals is observed. The impact of such actions is often underestimated.

The EESC agrees with the Commission's call for more responsibility on the part of social media platforms. However, the Commission's communication lacks any practical mandatory steps to ensure this. Online platforms and social networks should commit to such measures so as to ensure transparency, and take effective measures to improve the visibility of reliable, trustworthy news.

The EU should ensure and continue research on the impact of disinformation in Europe. The EESC agrees with the Commission that the fact-checking community should work closely together. Similar networks already exist, including one under the umbrella of the East StratCom Task Force.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 236 final – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach](#)

# Cybersecurity Act

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**Rapporteur:** Alberto Mazzola

**Co-rapporteur:** Antonio Longo

## Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The EU has taken a number of actions to increase resilience and enhance its cybersecurity. The present proposal reviews the current mandate of ENISA and lays down a renewed set of tasks and functions. The agency will become a centre of expertise supporting Member States and the Commission on cybersecurity certification. Moreover, in order to establish and preserve trust and security, ICT products and services need to directly incorporate security measures while customers and users need to ascertain the level of security and assurance of the products and services they procure and purchase, by means of certification, a formal evaluation of products, services and processes.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC considers that ENISA's new permanent mandate as proposed by the Commission will significantly contribute to enhancing the resilience of European systems. The EESC supports the proposal to create a cybersecurity competence network. This network would be sustained by a Cybersecurity Research and Competence Centre.

The EESC recalls that the human factor constitutes one of the most important causes of cyber accidents. There is a need to build a strong cyber skills base and improve cyber hygiene and awareness among individuals and businesses. The EESC supports the creation of an EU-certified curriculum for high schools and professionals.

The EESC believes that a European Digital Single Market needs a homogeneous interpretation and that a certification framework and schemes for the different sectors could provide a common baseline. Certification activities cannot exclude a proper labelling system. Europe should create a fund for deployment for cybersecurity, opening a new window in the current and future Connecting Europe Facility.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017\) 477 final - Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on ENISA, the "EU Cybersecurity Agency", and repealing Regulation \(EU\) 526/2013, and on Information and Communication Technology cybersecurity certification \("Cybersecurity Act"\)](#)

**2 Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on ENISA, the "EU Cybersecurity Agency", and repealing Regulation (EU) 526/2013, and on Information and Communication Technology cybersecurity certification ("Cybersecurity Act")**

## Protection of personal data

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**Rapporteur:** Laure Batut

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

Respect for communications is a fundamental right recognised in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. One of the main objectives of the Digital Single Market Strategy ("DSM Strategy") is to increase trust in and the security of digital services. A key action to this end was the adoption of the General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"). Whilst the GDPR ensures the protection of personal data, the reviewed ePrivacy Directive shall complement and particularise it as regards electronic communications data that qualify as personal data. Important technological and economic developments have taken place in the market since the last revision of the ePrivacy Directive in 2009. Communications sent through new services are not protected.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The appearance of new players in the data-processing sector, over and above internet access providers, must lead to a review of the relevant texts. Big Data has become a currency. Data being generated continuously means that all users are traceable and identifiable everywhere. Data processing carried out in centres which are mostly located physically outside Europe is a cause for concern.

The Committee welcomes the fact that a coherent package of rules is being put in place simultaneously throughout the EU to protect the rights of natural and legal persons linked to the usage of digital data by means of electronic communications. The Committee points to the risk of disparities resulting from the fact that such restrictions would be at the discretion of Member States.

A large set of recommendations is presented in the opinion to be taken into account by the Commission, amongst others that priorities linked to this regulation should include the education of users as well as anonymisation and encryption. The EESC advocates the creation of a European portal where all the European and national texts are brought together in one place and kept up to date, and also the publication of an online factsheet with a description of the texts for the general public which makes them accessible for everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017\) 10 final - Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the respect for private life and the protection of personal data in electronic communications and repealing Directive 2002/58/EC \(Regulation on Privacy and Electronic Communications\) - 2017/03 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the respect for private life and the protection of personal data in electronic communications and repealing Directive 2002/58/EC \(Regulation on Privacy and Electronic Communications\)](#)



## Processing of personal data

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**Rapporteur:** Jorge Pegado Liz

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The protection of personal data is a fundamental right enshrined in article 8 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The protection of personal data also applies to the processing of personal data by the EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies. This proposal aims to align the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 45/2001, the main piece of existing EU legislation on personal data protection in the Union institutions, with the principles and rules laid down in the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679).

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC is of the view that the EU institutions should serve as a model for Member State procedures. The EESC considers that some issues should have been addressed explicitly, such as: aligning the wording of the proposal with that of the Staff Regulations of Officials of the European Union, procedures for dealing with harassment, cyberbullying and whistleblowing, the Internet of Things, Big Data and the use of search engines, creating or using personal data, and the placing of personal information published on the websites of the institutions on social networking sites.

The EESC would like the proposal to have set out both the terms for the security of IT systems and the guarantees against cyber-attacks and breaches or leaks of such data. It would also like to have better clarification of the connection between data protection and the combating of crime and terrorism without needing to resort to disproportionate or excessive surveillance measures. These measures should always be subject to checks by the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS). The EESC stresses the need for the proposal to expressly provide for increased resources for the EDPS, ensuring sufficient staffing of people with high levels of knowledge and technical competence in the field of data protection.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017\) 8 final - Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation \(EC\) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC - 2017/02 \(COD\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation \(EC\) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC](#)

## Strengthening Europe's Cyber Resilience System

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**Rapporteur:** Thomas McDonogh

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The Commission is looking at ways to address the cybersecurity reality and assess additional measures to improve the EU's cybersecurity resilience and incident response. Furthermore, the Commission is addressing the question of cybersecurity industrial capacities in the EU. In its Communication, the Commission proposes a "firm commitment", based on cooperation to strengthen the preparedness and response to cybersecurity incidents.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

In its opinion, the EESC welcomes the Commission's initiative combining measures to strengthen Europe's cyber resilience system with measures to foster a competitive and innovative cybersecurity industry.

The Committee hopes that the contractual Public Private Partnership (cPPP) on cybersecurity will be used Europe-wide to support the development of companies specialising in cybersecurity. The EESC welcomes the intention to evaluate the mandate of the European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA) by the end of 2017 and hopes that a European authority for cybersecurity will be established, analogous to the European Aviation Safety Agency. It would also call on the Commission to consider creating a national cybersecurity development model and rating system, in order to measure each Member State's level of resilience.

It also advocates training in information governance, data protection and cybersecurity. Finally, the EESC considers that EU cybersecurity strategy and policy need to deliver on the following points: a leadership role for the EU; preservation of privacy and respect for fundamental rights; awareness-raising among citizens; informed and responsible businesses; deep partnership between governments, the private sector and citizens; technical standards and sufficient investments, particularly in R&D; and international engagement on the part of the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2016\) 410 final - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Strengthening Europe's Cyber Resilience System and Fostering a Competitive and Innovative Cybersecurity Industry](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Strengthening Europe's Cyber Resilience System and Fostering a Competitive and Innovative Cybersecurity Industry](#)

## Cyber activism and civil society organisations

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**Rapporteur:** Bernardo Hernández Bataller

### Background

Digital technologies are driving forward a process of citizen awareness and power through which society, acting as a network, is promoting transforming initiatives that are promoting values such as transparency, democratic participation, open cooperation, mutual solidarity, sustainability, fundamental rights, tolerance and pluralism.

The so-called "online digital activism" has enhanced the visibility, support and involvement of citizen initiatives that are pursuing social causes through online platforms. These platforms are providing voluntary services by supporting projects through digital activism, which is a new development in their usual sphere of action that gives the internet environment and social networks the accessibility, immediacy and critical mass that make it possible to carry out campaigns at a considerable cost saving.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

In today's digital society, cyberactivism is a useful tool for empowering citizens insofar as it facilitates and promotes active social engagement and participation through new technologies, while contributing to reducing social and digital exclusion. It must be distinguished from initiatives that are not prompted by democratic and solidarity-based principles and values and do not have the public interest and common good at heart.

If cyberactivism is to develop as a tool, both the European Commission and the Member States need work agendas that incorporate initiatives and measures to promote structures that accommodate an appropriate expansion of the network society by facilitating free and universal access, ensuring transparency and confidentiality and protecting the right to privacy and data security, paying particular attention to the most disadvantaged groups.

The EESC believes it is essential to provide the public with the necessary knowledge and skills to handle cyberactivism intelligently and securely. It therefore urges the European institutions to encourage awareness-raising activities, training and education, with special emphasis on disseminating good practice and eradicating the malicious use of online activism. In this regard, the resources considered necessary for the evaluation and development of cyberactivism should be made available.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Cyber activism and civil society organisations \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Illegal content on online platforms

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**Rapporteur:** Bernardo Hernandez Bataller

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

In its Communication, the Commission lays down a set of guidelines and principles for online platforms in order to step up the fight against illegal content online. With the aim of improving the implementation of practices for the prevention, detection, removal and disabling of access to illegal content, it also clarifies platform liability when proactive steps are taken ("Good Samaritan" actions). The guidance covers all categories of illegal content while acknowledging that different types of content may require different treatment. It relates to the activities of online platforms in the sense of Article 14 of the e-commerce directive.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The Committee emphasises the importance of establishing a suitable and balanced regulatory framework for platforms in the digital single market that could help to establish a climate of trust, both for businesses and for consumers in general, enabling them to use platforms with confidence. As regards the adoption of criteria and measures, the EESC considers it necessary to maintain consistency with the recommendations of its previous opinions. It also stresses the importance of technology neutrality and of coherence between rules that apply online and offline in equivalent situations, to the extent necessary and possible.

Appropriate measures should be taken by the Commission against the growing presence of violent and/or discriminatory messages on platforms, stressing the importance of protecting vulnerable people and children and combating all forms of racism, sexism, incitement to terrorism and harassment, including in the digital environment. Particular attention should be paid to the effectiveness of actions taken in relation to online platforms based outside the EU.

The Communication should include a reference to the potential impact of illegal content on the Single Market, so that the necessary preventive measures can be adopted to ensure that it can continue to operate in accordance with the principles that underpin it. The EESC strongly welcomes this Communication which, in general, provides a sound approach to tackling the presence of illegal content on online platforms. To this end, consideration should be given to the possibility of reviewing the content of the E-Commerce Directive, the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive and the Directive on Misleading and Comparative Advertising, on the basis, inter alia, of standards that are valid for the future, technologically neutral and vital to the development of European platforms, so as not to spread uncertainty among economic agents or limit access to digital services.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017\) 555 final – Communication from the Commission - Tackling Illegal Content Online - Towards an enhanced responsibility of online platforms](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Tackling Illegal Content Online — Towards an enhanced responsibility of online platforms'](#)

## Exchanging and protecting personal data in a globalised world

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**Rapporteur:** Cristian Pîrvulescu

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

The reform of EU data protection legislation adopted in April 2016 (GDPR) aims to put in place a system that both ensures a strong level of protection and is open to the opportunities of the global information society. The GDPR has provided several mechanisms enabling international data transfers. The reform of the rules on international transfers clarifies and simplifies their use and introduces new tools for transfers: Commission "adequacy decisions", standard contractual clauses and binding corporate rules, codes of conduct and certification mechanisms, and mutual assistance arrangements.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The opinion stresses that the EU has a responsibility to become a global actor in promoting respect for fundamental rights and adequate protection of private life and personal data and encourages the European Commission to be pro-active at bilateral and multilateral level in promoting the highest standard of personal data protection.

Promoting data protection standards through multilateral instruments should be a priority for the European Commission.

Council of Europe Convention No 108 of 1981 is the only binding multilateral instrument in the area of data protection and should be further developed.

Multilateral efforts within the OECD, G20 and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation should be further developed with a view to building a truly global multilateral system of data protection. Cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy should be solid and functional.

The EESC is a strong supporter of creating robust data protection safeguards, but is also open to the introduction of adequacy findings in the criminal law enforcement sector.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2017\) 07 final - COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on Exchanging and Protecting Personal Data in a Globalised World](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Exchanging and protecting personal data in a globalised world](#)

## Preventing the dissemination of terrorist content online

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**Rapporteur:** José Antonio Moreno Díaz

### Gist of the Commission document<sup>1</sup>

Every internet platform that wants to offer its services in the European Union will be subject to clear rules to prevent their services from being misused to disseminate terrorist content. Strong safeguards will also be introduced to protect freedom of speech on the internet and ensure only terrorist content is targeted.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>2</sup>

The EESC welcomes the Commission proposal on preventing the dissemination of terrorist content online, as it seeks greater security for EU inhabitants. At the same time, freedom of expression, freedom of access to information and communication, and the confidentiality of communications are very important to the Committee.

The EESC emphasises that users must be clearly reminded of the national rules on the production of terrorist content. It also calls for the right to appeal against the administrative decision to be guaranteed with a clear explanation of this right and online tools for its exercise.

The EESC calls for indeterminate legal concepts such as "terrorist information, terrorist acts, terrorist groups or advocacy of terrorism" to be defined as precisely as possible.

Automated detection (automated parameters, algorithms, search engines, etc.) is very useful, but the intervention of a human as mediator and intermediary is crucial in assessing this content.

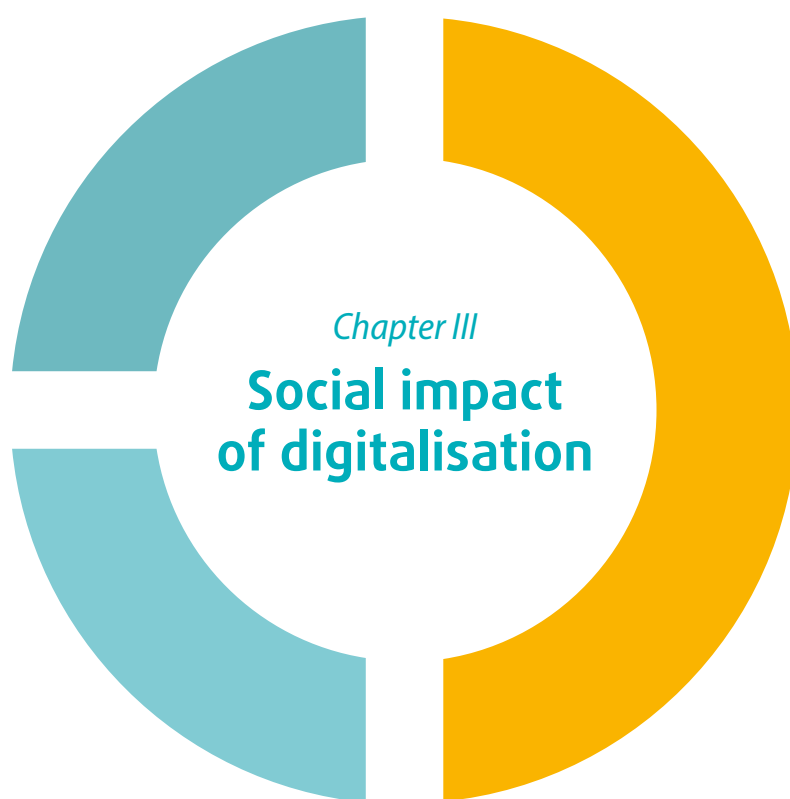
The EESC warns against censorship or self-imposed censorship on the Internet.

The measures proposed should help to boost trust in the internet and thus ensure the economic development of this sector. The EESC highlights the need to assess the effects of the application of this proposal on SMEs, as well as to consider transition arrangements facilitating their adaptation and a level playing field.

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<sup>1</sup> [COM\(2018\) 640 final - Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on preventing the dissemination of terrorist content online - A contribution from the European Commission to the Leaders' meeting in Salzburg on 19-20 September 2018](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing the dissemination of terrorist content online'](#)



## The digital revolution in view of citizens' needs and rights

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**Rapporteur:** Ulrich Samm

### Background

The digital revolution is often described as if technical progress was predetermined and the citizens had no choice but to adapt to it. This opinion aims to make it clear that the needs and desires of the citizens as well as their rights are going to have a decisive impact on further technical development. The aim of this opinion is to contrast the influence of citizens on how technology is accepted, on market uptake and the on development of society's rules (laws) against the vision of "Technology without Borders".

By taking both sides into consideration – the perspective of technology and the perspective of citizens' needs – some principles emerge that may, perhaps, help to increase citizens' trust in the future development of the digital revolution. This confidence must be based on the strength of the citizen in his/her various roles in society, for example as a consumer, as a free individual, as a learner, as a voter or as an employer/employee. Not everything that is technically possible will ultimately be implemented in our society.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

Digitalisation offers a wealth of new possibilities allowing people to make choices for a better life in an unprecedented way. On the other hand, the more digitalisation dominates our life, the more we can also be manipulated. The EESC calls for transparent rules to be developed, adapted and applied to these rapidly evolving technologies. Good persuasive technology should involve training, not manipulation, and comply with the principle of people's free choice, to guarantee human autonomy.

The EESC calls on the EU to develop and adapt strict security rules for new evolving technologies for the protection of citizens in their homes. The Committee welcomes the approach of improving road safety by introducing more digital technology in cars. The EESC believes that a European strategy must be developed to adapt and modify our road system so that fully autonomous vehicles with 100% safety can become a success.

The individual consumer, who does not have professional digital skills, needs strong support in using complex digital systems. Simplification and standardised procedures across the EU are needed to help the consumer. The EESC recommends, whenever new automation systems are planned in industry, commerce and service sector, using objective scientific methods to optimise and evaluate human-machine interaction, such as cognitive ergonomics. The EESC is convinced that only with human centred design will digitalisation be successful in the long term.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on "The digital revolution in view of citizens' needs and rights" \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)



# The effects of a new carbon-free, decentralised and digitalised energy supply structure on jobs and regional economies

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**Rapporteur:** Lutz Ribbe

## Background

This own-initiative opinion is concerned with the regional economic effects of the transition to decentralised, renewable, digitalised forms of energy supply. The opinion addresses a gap in the public and political debate which tends to focus on the environmental benefits (climate mitigation; air pollution) or focus on the risks associated with the decentralised transition (digital divide; supply disruptions).

The underlying assumption is that decentralised, smart energy production provides economic benefits for Europe's regions because, to name but a few, the need for fuel imports would decrease, economic value would be added within the region especially if ownership remains local, sustainable and good quality jobs through the installation, operation, and maintenance of renewable energy production would be created, and regional tax revenue increased.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The key message of the opinion is that transforming the energy system towards carbon-free, decentralised and digitalised supply offers enormous opportunities, in particular for structurally weak and rural regions in Europe. The development of renewable energy can have a major and beneficial impact on employment, and can be configured so as to provide a completely new stimulus for the regional economy. There is therefore potential for mutually reinforcing the positive effects of Europe's energy and cohesion policies. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) finds it regrettable that both the Commission and the Member States have yet to properly recognise this potential, let alone exploit it.

The EESC recommends that, in the context of "plans for regional energy circular economies", analysis should be carried out that is capable of providing a differentiated assessment of renewable energy's potential for each regional economy. Plans for regional energy circular economies could form the basis of a structured and nuanced dialogue with local people which is important (a) for maintaining or establishing local approval for renewable energy and (b) strengthening regional centres of economic activity.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the effects of a new carbon-free, decentralised and digitalised energy supply structure on jobs and regional economies \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

# Implications of the digitalisation and robotisation of transport on for EU policy-making

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**Rapporteur:** Tellervo Kylä-Harukka-Ruonala

## Background

Digital development provides plenty of opportunities for transport and mobility. Digital platforms offer new business concepts that enable passengers and other transport users to consider mobility as a new kind of service and help optimise resource efficiency. Automatisation and robotics also open new perspectives for transporting goods and people, as well as for various kinds of monitoring. The rapid advancement of new technologies enables new kinds of production and consumption models and business opportunities. In order to make best possible use of the opportunities, encouraging and supportive environment for innovation, investment and operation is needed. Furthermore, risks of these developments have to be identified and managed.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

Digitalisation and robotisation in the field of the mobility of people and the transport of goods can provide society with several potential benefits such as better accessibility and convenience for passengers, efficiency and productivity for logistics, improved traffic safety and reduced emissions. At the same time, there are concerns relating to safety, security, privacy, labour and the environment.

The EESC stresses the intermodal character of digital transport. Realising digital transport requires solutions for existing bottlenecks, as well as integrated investments along the TEN-T network in transport, energy and telecommunication systems, including the deployment of 5G.

The digitalisation and robotisation of transport provide new business opportunities for both manufacturing and service industries, including SMEs. To this end, the EESC calls for an encouraging and enabling business environment. At the same time, this development will bring about profound changes in the nature of work and the demand for skills. The EESC highlights the importance of dealing with these structural changes by enhancing a fair and smooth transition and addressing the skills gap, together with the appropriate monitoring of progress.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Implications of the digitalisation and robotisation of transport for EU policy-making \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

# The digital pillar of growth: e-seniors, a potential 25% of the European population

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**Rapporteur:** Laure Batut

## Background

The European Commission's action programme is based on three pillars aimed at creating jobs and growth, the first of which is improving access to digital goods and services for consumers and businesses throughout Europe: the Commission wants to make internet use an integral part of daily life and move towards "an inclusive digital society" by increasing "digital skills and learning by citizens" and the use of big data, cloud computing and cyber security. E-seniors are a potential 25% of the European population. The EESC should therefore define the means for ensuring that this 25% of the European population (125 million) learn to make use of hardware and software and computer applications in everyday life or keep up their skills in this area.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

In its opinion, the EESC refers to the sizeable population of older people in the EU and to the economic potential that they represent. The diversity of older people calls for a new approach. The EESC therefore recommends changing the approach to "older people" and to the "silver economy" that has developed in the EU.

While it welcomes the Commission's June 2016 communication on a new skills agenda, and the proposal for a Council recommendation on establishing a skills guarantee, it is disappointed that older people and digital skills are barely cited, if at all. In particular, the EESC calls for financial resources to be made available which are exempted from the requirements of the European Semester and for an "equality for older people" clause in the digital sector. In the EESC's view, it is essential for older people to have access to a European programme for the exchange of best practice and to promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) aimed at facilitating the development of skills and digital training at all ages.

The EESC is in favour of providing citizens with a code of European rules on digital technology, available in several languages via a one-stop shop.

Finally, it considers that in order to reinforce the digital pillar of growth, it is essential to recognise internet access as a universal right and to provide free internet access to disadvantaged older people.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the digital pillar of growth: e-seniors, a potential 25% of the European population \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Social innovation, networking and digital communication

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**Rapporteur:** Bernardo Hernández Bataller

### Background

The scope of the EU Digital Agenda covers research and innovation, including social innovation, i.e. new strategies, concepts, ideas and organizations that meet social needs of all kinds, extend and strengthen civil society. Social innovation is essential for society's development and significantly improves its capacity for action. It involves numerous stakeholders and different forms of interactions that can be facilitated and enhanced by the use of new ICTs.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC concludes that social innovation and collaborative networks must become tools to boost participation of the public and civil society in general in designing and managing EU policies that strengthen more direct democracy. Social innovation, based on the new technologies, can play an important role in creating new skilled jobs by supporting projects seeking to set up new and innovative businesses. Strengthening training is also essential, within the educational system for young people as in a form of an ongoing training that qualifies workers to use ICTs on the labour market. The EESC calls for social innovation and the use of new technologies; social networks and collaborative work for implementing of technical solutions that help people with disabilities.

It furthermore calls on the EU to encourage and finance the framing and implementation of projects, conceived by citizens and implemented via social networks and collaborative working, which encompass actions of general interest.

The European Commission must launch a clear and concrete policy on social innovation and public access to the new technologies that triggers initiatives bringing shared benefits to the population, in line with the European Commission's Social Investment Package. Essentially, a package of investments is needed to strengthen social innovation on the basis of technological development, the promotion of collaborative research and access to new knowledge, and institutional strengthening through the direct democracy made possible by these new network participation and digital communication tools.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Social innovation, networking and digital communication \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

# Electromagnetic hypersensitivity

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**Rapporteur:** Bernardo Hernández Bataller

## Background

Each day the number of EHS sufferers increases: according to new estimates, between 3% and 5% of the population are electro-sensitive, meaning that some 13 million Europeans may suffer from this syndrome, which has various names (electro-sensitivity, Wi-Fi syndrome, microwave syndrome, electromagnetic hypersensitivity, etc.).

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

Exposure to electromagnetic fields has been increasing in recent years, following the expansion of technologies. In addition to health problems, this can result in limited access to many public or private facilities, especially in buildings where devices have been installed for transmitting wireless technology.

These people may sometimes suffer the incomprehension and scepticism of doctors who do not deal with this syndrome professionally and therefore fail to offer proper diagnosis and treatment. Due to the serious differences in scientific opinion, the independence of bodies involved in establishing maximum exposure levels must be reinforced. The EESC is in favour of adopting binding safeguarding legislation that reduces or mitigates exposure to electromagnetic fields.

The EU should assist currently affected groups and limit exposure fields in light of the recommendations set out in this opinion, especially with respect to recognising this exposure as a cause of functional disability and environmental illness.

The EESC emphasises the need to step up the application of the ALARA principle, bearing in mind the risk of non-thermal biological effects of electromagnetic emissions. In addition, it is important to facilitate research in this area. The EESC is in favour of ensuring a high level of health protection for workers by applying the improvements that are available, while this principle should be included in European legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on electromagnetic hypersensitivity \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

# Artificial intelligence: anticipating its impact on jobs to ensure a fair transition

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**Rapporteur:** Franca Salis-Madinier

## Background

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) have an enormous impact, particularly on certain sectors such as banking, insurance, transport, information technology and health. The quantity and quality of jobs will be powerfully affected. These changes and developments need to be guided and governed in order to reduce the negative impact on workers, businesses and consumers, and thereby ensure a fair transition.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC flags up the potential of AI and its applications and would like to give its input to efforts to lay the groundwork for the social transformations which will go hand in hand with the rise of AI and robotics.

The EESC:

- calls on the European Commission to promote and support studies on the sector-specific impact of AI and robotics;
- supports the idea of a fully-fledged European transition fund which would help manage the digital transformation in a socially responsible way;
- recommends applying and reinforcing the principles, commitments and obligations set out in the existing texts on informing and consulting workers, particularly when deploying new technologies, including AI and robotics;
- calls for a European programme that takes an inclusive approach to AI, is founded on these texts and on the European Pillar of Social Rights, and involves all stakeholders;
- recommends that the ethical guidelines on AI to be prepared by the Commission draw a line in the sand for interaction between workers and intelligent machines and factor in principles of transparency when using AI systems for recruitment, assessment and supervision of workers for management purposes;
- recommends that engineers and intelligent machine designers be trained in ethics.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on artificial intelligence: anticipating its impact on work to ensure a fair transition \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Towards digital health

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**Rapporteur:** Renate Heinisch

### Background

People searching for information, patients and healthcare professionals have highlighted the need for comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information on medicinal products. Such information must be easily accessible to allow visually impaired patients access as well. It must be possible to adjust the information to suit the needs of the individual/patient/healthcare professionals so as to provide the necessary level of detail for the most effective and safe use of the medicine.

The EU has launched a very broad "Digital agenda" that also contains proposals for "mobile health" that seeks to ensure that the public enjoys better health and ages well.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC:

- endorses the European Commission's efforts to make eHealth a high priority within the Digital Agenda;
- notes that people seeking information, patients and healthcare professionals have stressed the need for full, accurate and up-to-date information on medicinal products and for a single digital market;
- is of the view that this officially approved information must be available without discrimination or obstacle so as to afford access for the deaf and the visually or otherwise physically impaired;
- believes electronic distribution of product information approved by drug licensing authorities will further improve access;
- points out that having all this on a single portal means there is a trustworthy and in many ways easily accessible source of officially authorised information that meets disability-access criteria;
- stresses that doctors (particularly GPs) and other healthcare professionals, such as pharmacists and nurses, are the first point of contact for patients, providing them with recommendations regarding their ailments and treatment options.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Towards digital health - electronic information for safe use of medicinal products own-initiative opinion\)](#)

# How media is used to influence social and political processes in the EU and Eastern neighbouring countries

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**Rapporteur:** Indrė Vareikytė

## Gist of the information report<sup>1</sup>

A variety of tools and methods are currently used to undermine European values and influence the Eastern Partnership and other external actions of the EU, as well as to develop and provoke separatist and nationalistic attitudes, manipulate the public and conduct direct interference in the domestic policy of sovereign countries and the EU as a whole. In response to the current situation, EU institutions together with the Member States should develop an action plan on strategic communication, covering these major areas:

- enhancing EU communication and media quality;
- increasing support for existing EU and Eastern Partnership media outlets;
- strengthening media cooperation networks;
- developing and sustaining platforms for media communication;
- involving and trusting local journalists and supporting local initiatives aimed at the local agenda;
- encouraging media engagement of reporting on EU matters; sharing best practices;
- enhancing the level of good governance in media outlets and ensuring transparency;
- fostering independent academic research on media;
- ensuring adequate resources for implementing the necessary measures.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the Committee recommends taking the following action:

- establishing a position of EU media spokesperson for Russia-related issues;
- supporting the establishment and functioning of Europe-wide monitoring initiatives to systematically track false information;
- encouraging Member States and their regulators to more actively analyse, and raise awareness of, cases of disinformation, propaganda, attempts to manipulate, deceive, incite hatred and propagate war;
- increasing support for the exchange of European-made media content;
- establishing a co-funding scheme for reporters from broadcasters in the EU Eastern border countries, Eastern Partnership states and Member States that do not have sufficient resources to report on EU news from Brussels;
- engaging and strengthening independent Russian language media outlets by encouraging cooperation with national and EU-wide broadcasters for sharing content and reporting;
- strengthening the promotion of European identity and core values.

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<sup>1</sup> [Information Report of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'How media is used to influence social and political processes in the EU and Eastern neighbouring countries'](#)



## Effects of digitalisation on service industries and employment

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**Rapporteur:** Wolfgang Greif

**Co-rapporteur:** Hannes Leo

### Background

Digitalisation transforms all segments of society and the economy and thus logically affects work and employment as well. Digital technology has the potential to increase wealth to unprecedented levels and can boost the quality of work and employment in Europe. However, these opportunities come with risks attached, as is evident in all economic sectors, also including the private service industry.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

Estimates suggest that digitalisation leads to a decline in overall demand for labour and thus entails job losses. These developments in turn challenge the effectiveness of existing systems of vocational education and training, employment protection, social security and taxation.

In order to provide the EU workforce with the skills it requires in the digital age, public and private investment in vocational education have to be promoted and EU framework legislation guaranteeing minimum entitlements to paid educational leave should be considered.

Better statistics and research are needed to deliver detailed accounts of the impact of digitalisation on the polarisation of work organisation and income.

In order to ensure that new forms of work organisation improve rather than deteriorate job quality, the introduction of new forms of work organisation should be made subject to negotiation between the social partners. An adjusted definition of the status of employee should be considered in order to ensure that the established body of labour law is applicable to the entire labour market, including workers in the new forms of employment.

The EU, national governments and the social partners should initiate debates with a view to defining political measures and legislation that ensure high levels of mandatory social protection for the entire workforce – including those in non-standard forms of employment. In order to bolster employment despite declining demand for labour, the instrument of working time reduction through collective agreements or legislation needs to be considered, as well as public investments in job-creating innovation and job creation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'The effects of digitalisation on the services sector and employment in relation to industrial change' \(exploratory opinion\)](#)

## Digital gender gap

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**Rapporteur:** Giulia Barbucci

### Background

The exploratory opinion was requested by the European Parliament and is expected to feed into a debate on "Digitalisation and the women's role".

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

It is important to increase the number of women in STEM and the digital literacy of girls. It is necessary to encourage women's participation in technical and high-level jobs by overcoming educational and professional barriers and stereotypes as well as guaranteeing digital lifelong learning.

To prevent the spiral of feminisation of poverty, fair working conditions and access to social protection must be guaranteed. It is important to enhance labour market participation of women with disabilities, implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD).

Female entrepreneurship must be supported by removing barriers to women's access to self-employment and improving access to social protection measures. All policies all levels should be designed with a gender perspective. Gender budgeting and a gender lense can be useful tools in this regard.

"Smartworking" and teleworking should be monitored in order to avoid the risks of blurring of boundaries between care, work and private life.

The European Commission should recommend that Member States set national targets and country specific recommendations in this field should be directed towards them.

The role of collective bargaining is crucial in lifelong learning, in addressing gender roles in the labour market, in promoting the role of women in decision-making, in supporting work-life balance and in tackling the gender pay gap.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Digital gender gap' - \(exploratory opinion requested by the European Parliament\)](#)

## Transition management in a digitalised world of work

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**Rapporteur:** Franca Salis-Madinier

**Co-rapporteur:** Ulrich Samm

### Background

The digitalised world of work will necessitate proper management of the digital transition – not only from the side of enterprises but also from that of human capital. On the one hand, enterprises have to identify and assess the new needs and draw up and implement plans for controlling the risks and reducing the costs of the transition; employees, on the other hand, should be helped to accept that things will no longer be the way they used to be and, through appropriate guidance and training, to adapt to the new reality, so that they can seize the opportunities offered and thrive.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC:

- supports a fair digital transition, underpinned by respect for EU values that advocate full employment, social progress, a high level of protection, and reducing poverty and inequalities;
- calls for the huge potential offered by new technologies to benefit everyone: workers, citizens and companies. There should be no losers;
- considers up-skilling for European workers to be a priority, particularly for those whose low or obsolete skills prevent them from taking up the new jobs or the jobs that will be modified as a result of technologies;
- recommends that the social dialogue on sharing the added value be organised at sector and company level in order to agree on how they are to be used;
- points out that the lack of clarity surrounding how algorithms work and how they make the choices that are beyond human control poses massive challenges for Europe and fundamental questions about the society we want to live in. An approach centred on humans controlling machines is fundamental;
- is in favour of global policy frameworks for AI that would give the EU a competitive advantage, and encourages the development of socially responsible AI that serves the common good;
- emphasises that the EU should support the new research field of cognitive ergonomics, aimed at adopting measures facilitating a human-centred use of smart technologies.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on EU concepts for transition management in a digitalised world of work – key input for an EU White Paper on the future of work \(exploratory opinion requested by the Austrian Presidency\)](#)

## Social dialogue for innovation in digital economy

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**Rapporteur:** Jukka Ahtela

### Background

It is not yet possible to predict the full range of opportunities and challenges that the digital economy will bring. The role of social and civic dialogue is not to oppose these transitions, but rather to steer them in the best way possible for reaping the full range of benefits they can bring for growth, the promotion of innovation and skills, good jobs and the sustainable, solidarity-based financing of social protection.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

New participative approaches are needed to engage the maximum of human resources in the innovation and development processes.

The EESC stresses the importance of understanding the benefits which will accrue to employees from the adoption of new approaches in workplace culture, in terms of security and quality of employment. The social partners should continue to find new solutions for the social dialogue, notably for negotiations, adapted to deliver balanced solutions.

The EESC believes that the probability of innovation is boosted when strong work organisation structures are combined with increased employee participation within a solid legal and contractual framework. Collective representation needs to be increasingly accompanied by a more inclusive, reflective and democratic dialogue in work structures and methods. The importance of training for management to adapt management methods in the new context should be taken into account. A trusting relationship between employee representation and management, in combination with direct employee participation, is associated with higher levels of performance and well-being and creates a positive environment for innovative action.

National level initiatives should be promoted in a wider European context. The EESC welcomes the initiatives and research of Eurofound and the European Workplace Innovation Network and proposes that the EU take action to develop the dialogue between social partners and other stakeholders in the context of participative approaches to promote workplace innovation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Social dialogue for innovation in digital economy' \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)

## Future of work and skills

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**Rapporteur:** Cinzia del Rio

**Co-rapporteur:** Milena Angelova

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

Quality basic education, as well as high-standard and effective training, lifelong learning, up- and re-skilling will be the necessary tools for grasping the job opportunities of the future and fostering enterprise competitiveness. The EESC, taking into account the subsidiarity principle, asks the European Commission and the Member States to design targeted policies and take tangible measures in order to improve and adapt their education and training systems, co-design national competency strategies and recognise the right to appropriate training for all age groups of people and workers and across sectors by:

- first ensuring that all EU citizens have equal access to quality early education;
- setting new common education and training benchmarks;
- reorienting education and training and strengthening VET systems in order to ensure the rapid acquisition of the necessary skills;
- supporting collective bargaining and social dialogue in order to anticipate and adapt the skills to digital developments and develop on-the-job training;
- encouraging interaction between education institutions and companies;
- launching a qualification offensive to underpin growing digitalisation;
- including everybody in training programmes, with particular attention to low-skilled and adult workers;
- securing for all the provisions of, and participation in, training;
- taking steps to check if and what measures are needed to establish the right to paid educational leave;
- setting up a European homogeneous system of evaluation and validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- investing at EU level to accompany the transition;
- supporting "brain exchange" opportunities and creating platforms for information and best-practice sharing.
- It is important to keep a human-centred approach.
- Last but not least, the EESC asks the EC and the Member States to find ways not to leave behind, but to accompany, vulnerable people.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'the Future of work – acquiring of appropriate knowledge and skills to meet the needs of future jobs' \(exploratory opinion requested by the Bulgarian presidency\)](#)

## A socially sustainable concept for the digital era

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Rapporteur: Giulia Barbucci

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

All policies put in place by European, national and local institutions should take account of the **social sustainability factor** in the same way that they do for economic and environmental sustainability. The EESC:

- recommends that the proposals in the Commission's current work programme be designed to promote the sustainability of the **European social model**;
- supports the European Parliament's recommendation that the Commission and social partners work together to present a proposal for a framework directive on **decent working conditions** in all forms of employment;
- sees a clear connection between **competitiveness, productivity and social sustainability**: all stakeholders must commit themselves to promoting **inclusive growth** and foster conditions that are favourable for the world of enterprise, and create more and better jobs;
- advocates stepping up efforts to **iron out regional disparities**;
- calls on European and national institutions to **guarantee continuity of income in an adequate manner**, particularly for the most disadvantaged;
- recommends creating the right conditions to **guarantee competitiveness, job creation and smooth transitions between jobs**;
- recommends developing inclusive collective bargaining at all levels and considering new measures aimed at increasing women's access to digital jobs, **eliminating gender-based wage differences**, resolutely protecting **motherhood** by means of appropriate instruments and creating the conditions for **effective gender equality** in the world of work;
- believes that social sustainability is based on fair and effective opportunities for **life-long learning**, particularly considering the potential exclusion of broad segments of the population as a result of **digital exclusion**;
- calls for steps to **reduce the skills deficit** in key areas of the digital economy;
- considers it essential to provide **digital literacy training** for anyone at risk of being excluded, as a result of digitalisation, from exercising their rights and accessing the social services.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'A socially sustainable concept for raising living standards, boosting growth and employment, as well as citizens' security in the digital era' \(exploratory opinion at the request of the Bulgarian Presidency\)](#)

## Provision and development of skills for new forms of work

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Rapporteur: Ulrich Samm

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

Due to the availability of very high-capacity broadband networks, a growing number of **atypical work forms** are being developed. The EESC emphasises that the provision of **social security** and the **avoidance of poverty** must be given high priority and that social risks should be dealt with through the **coordinated efforts of all stakeholders**. In this context, the EESC would like to see certain national initiatives developed by trade unions and civil society for the **provision of guidance to crowdworkers**, taken up by the Commission and applied at European scale. Increasing information asymmetry between consumers and businesses, on the other hand, will have to be dealt with by methods such as the **ethical codes** for liberal professions.

**Automation and robots** will also have a significant impact on the future of work: they can replace monotonous, heavy or dangerous work and can be particularly helpful for people with physical disabilities; they have the potential to **stabilise** the economy in an ageing society. Yet, a significant number of **jobs will be affected** by the introduction of more robots into the workplace. This is why the EESC believes that **social dialogue** will be needed at an early stage.

Taking into account these challenges, the EESC is of the opinion that it should be ensured that **appropriate skills** are available, so that Europe remains competitive and is able to create new businesses and new jobs, people can remain integrated in the labour market throughout their entire working lives, and well-being for all is assured. These future skills should match **societal needs** and the **demands of the labour market**. **Lifelong learning** will be a necessity for everyone, while much more time will have to be devoted to **professional training and informal learning**. More specifically, public and private organisations will have to provide professional training in **new technologies**, especially for those who do not have the capacity to organise training themselves, such as SMEs, the liberal professions and the self-employed. Long-term developments though, which may lead to new and unpredictable challenges where today's skills can quickly become obsolete, can best be dealt with by **general education**. Qualitative preparation of **educators** will, therefore, be of key importance, according to the EESC, as well as their status in terms of professional flexibility, remuneration, and social guarantees.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Provision and development of skills, including digital skills, in the context of new forms of work: new policies and changing roles and responsibilities' \(exploratory opinion requested by the Estonian Presidency\)](#)

## The role of social partners and CSOs in new forms of work

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**Rapporteur:** Franca Salis-Madinier

**Co-rapporteur:** Jukka Ahtela

### Background

New forms of work are having an influence on the traditional employment relationship, blurring the lines of who is a worker, who is an employer and whether an employment relationship exists or not. New forms of work and employment relationships and the resulting fragmentation of work mean that many workers are placed outside traditional collective bargaining structures and trade union representation.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC believes that the need to acknowledge the role that social dialogue and collective bargaining play at all levels is now greater than ever. The role of social and civic dialogue is not to oppose these transitions, but rather to steer them in the best way possible for reaping the full range of benefits they can bring for growth, the promotion of innovation and skills, good jobs and the sustainable, solidarity-based financing of social protection, whilst ensuring that people can still assert the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the ILO conventions.

Digitalisation defies traditional methods of management and administration; it calls for participative management, and for collective rules to be drawn up and the adaptation of the structure of and arrangements for social dialogue.

The EESC recommends respecting the autonomy of the social partners who, through collective bargaining, have undertaken to find innovative forms of social dialogue and responses tailored to the needs of employers and workers, both in traditional enterprises and in the digital economy. The question of greater cooperation between the social partners and other civil society organisations is also raised, such as broad consultation at government level that brings other civil society stakeholders into broader debates on the overall impact of digitalisation. Digitalisation and its effects on work need to be a priority. The EESC recommends monitoring the developments, as well as their impact on industrial relations, working conditions and social dialogue, and improving the effectiveness and relevance of social dialogue by exchanging information, drawing up forward studies, pooling best practice and achieving an appropriate legislative and non-legislative framework.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'The role and opportunities of social partners and other civil society organizations in the context of the new forms of work' \(exploratory opinion\)](#)



# Sustainable social security and social protection systems in the digital era

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**Rapporteur:** Petru Sorin Dandea

## Background

Social security systems in Europe, as we know them today, were built more than half a century ago. They are based on a direct relationship with the labour market, being often financed from contributions paid by employees and employers. Digitisation has produced and continues to produce major changes in the labour market. These changes are reflected in forms of employment that differ increasingly from permanent individual labour contracts.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

Given this situation, the EESC:

- recommends that the Member States and European courts regulate the new forms of employment, so that the employer and the worker can be clearly identified;
- considers that the debate should also encompass the situation of workers engaged in new forms of employment and, above all, look at how to recognise their status and guarantee their access to social security and social protection systems;
- recommends that the Member States consider linking up the electronic systems of their national pension schemes, or health insurance schemes, with those of their tax administrations;
- believes that the Member States should consider introducing a requirement into their legislation governing pension schemes making it mandatory to pay contributions for all individuals generating professional income;
- calls on the Member States to explore ways of funding social security systems that not only ensure the sustainability of those systems, but also meet the need to provide access to them to people engaged in the new forms of work; and
- recommends further examining the current proposal that an unemployment insurance scheme be established at EU level.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Sustainable social security and social protection systems in the digital era' \(exploratory opinion\)](#)

## Changing employment relations

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**Rapporteur:** Kathleen Walker Shaw

### Background

There is a shift from the traditional employment relationship to more non-standard forms of employment. The EESC is asked to examine the changing nature of employment relationships and its link to a decent living wage and make policy recommendations as to how to regulate and mitigate the effects of new forms of employment relationships. The challenge is to encourage innovation and creativity and deliver positive outcomes for a sustainable and competitive social market economy.

### Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

The EESC considers it a priority to develop social welfare models adapted to cover more flexible forms of employment. This should be given consideration in the development of the EU Pillar of Social Rights.

The EESC requests and/or suggests:

- clarifying the legal status of new labour market intermediaries and which standards, obligations, liabilities and rules of operation should apply;
- addressing the issues relating to regulation of the activity of the intermediary, liability for accidents, damage and service failures;
- clarifying the applicability of existing EU regulations on safety and health at work for these new forms of employment;
- clarifying possible grey zones linked to employment status in relation to taxation and social insurance;
- ensuring that the European Commission, the OECD and the ILO work together with the social partners to develop appropriate provisions on decent working conditions and protection for online workers;
- making sure that the EU employment policy agenda underpins the digital transformation of our economies and labour markets and aims to maximise quality employment and protect and re-skill/up-skill those who will be affected by digitalisation;
- putting in place effective rights and protections, monitoring and enforcement in order to avoid widening income inequalities and reduction in disposable incomes and ensure the sustainable potential for economic growth across the EU;
- encouraging the development of European platforms, so that value created remains in local economies.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'The changing nature of employment relationships and its impact on maintaining a living wage and the impact of technological developments on the social security system and labour law' \(exploratory opinion\)](#)

# The transition towards a more sustainable European future – a strategy for 2050

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**Rapporteur:** Brenda King

**Co-rapporteur:** Lutz Ribbe

## Background

Europe 2020 did not deliver and has to be reformed. An enhanced, renewed strategy should be established with a much broader perspective and time-frame. EU civil society should take the lead in proposing an ambitious EU strategy which is communicated through a new narrative for the future and appeals to the young.

## Gist of the opinion<sup>1</sup>

Like all other parts of the world, Europe is facing three major issues: (1) the depletion of the earth's natural resources; (2) social inequalities; and (3) public loss of trust in the political establishment. These three issues need to be understood against the background of digitalisation and globalisation. Based on a thorough analysis of the interplay between these issues and digitalisation, the EESC calls on the Commission to prepare a long-term strategy for Europe's sustainable development. This opinion aims to put forward issues and input to be considered in the preparation of the long-term strategy.

First, this opinion analyses the positive and negative societal and economic impacts of digitalisation. Second, the implications of planetary limitations and the overall ecological challenge are discussed. Third, the opinion presents figures related to social inequality, followed by an analysis of the loss of public support in governments and international institutions. It is critically important that the strategy encompass precise policy recommendations to help address the three major challenges that Europe faces and so make "the Europe we want" a reality. Part 5 of the opinion sets out recommendations for the future in four policy sectors, each of which consists of key six elements: innovation, regulation/governance, social policy, open access, education/training and research a fair, digital and green economy, new forms of governance, sustainability and the financial sector, promoting sustainability through international trade.

The EESC recommends that such a strategy be geared to the long term, and that it be explicit, horizontally and vertically integrated, manageable and participatory. Therefore the EESC considers it crucial to ensure that the transition to 2050 is designed and conducted with the full involvement of civil society representatives.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'The transition towards a more sustainable European future – a strategy for 2050' \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)











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1040 Bruxelles/Brussel  
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

Published by: "Visits and Publications" Unit  
EESC-2019-35-EN

[www.eesc.europa.eu](http://www.eesc.europa.eu)



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*Print*  
QE-01-19-295-EN-C  
ISBN 978-92-830-4487-1  
doi:10.2864/990749

*Online*  
QE-01-19-295-EN-N  
ISBN 978-92-830-4488-8  
doi:10.2864/878400

EN