



Civil Society for rEUnaissance

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European Economic and Social Committee



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Civil society intends to play its part in the run up to the European elections scheduled for 23-26 May. With the aim of mobilising members and organisations at all levels, the European Economic and Social Committee organised an event entitled **Civil Society for rEUnaissance** on 21 February 2019.

The event was moderated by **Shada Islam, Director of Europe and Geopolitics at Friends of Europe**, a renowned and influential independent think tank based in Brussels.

In the words of the **EESC President, Luca Jahier**, the purpose of the event was to “rally the troops” around the European Union to defend it against those who pretend to save it by killing it.

Populist parties have tripled their vote in Europe over the past 20 years. They are in government in 11 European countries. More than a quarter of Europeans voted for populists in their last elections.

“Today is an important day for democracy. A little more than 90 days before the European elections, we have gathered here to ask ourselves: are we brave enough to grasp the urgency of the moment?” President Jahier said in his introductory remarks.

“Democracy is under attack. Euroscepticism, racism and anti-Semitism are growing, which is a great concern. Our values are being questioned, the right to work for the common good is not perceived as the core of our political action.”



Quoting Francis Fukuyama, Jahier said that the divisions and demands that are growing in Europe and the world are increasingly founded on the request for dignity or recognition and accompanied by a powerful return to questions of identity. These requests are intertwined with a widespread process of social narcissism, which is undermining the sense of the common good and the collective.

What is rEUnaissance?

President Luca Jahier coined the slogan in April 2018 when he became the 32nd president of the EESC. He is convinced more and more that Europe needs a new Renaissance. The Renaissance was a powerful and vast humanistic revolution, which re-established the real dimension of culture in its concrete relation science, the art of government and the organisation of economic and social life and provided the foundation for the modern transformation of Europe.

Luca Jahier

Give centre stage to the 'voices of good': Forza Buoni!

The EESC President decided to invite those who represent this movement of "good voices", the symbols of what he calls "rEUnaissance", to the event, to inspire representatives of organised civil society and awaken their conscience.



"We must listen to the people whose hopes and opinions are drowned out by the incessant violence of rallying cries. The majority whose constant, daily efforts to improve their lives and those of their communities are too quiet to make it into the headlines of the tabloids."

Forza Buoni, Come on Good!
Jahier said paraphrasing the President of Italy, Sergio Mattarella.

Among other voices, the EESC President invited **climate activist Greta Thunberg**. She is only 16 years old and in less than six months, she has – with tremendous courage and determination – started a climate movement that is gathering consensus across the planet.

"Greta you're right!", said the President. "She is the voice of our conscience, of our children. The best way to face those who today oppose the European project without proposing anything concrete is to strongly affirm that Europe has a clear strategy for the next decade. This strategy is the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development based on the Treaty of the European Union, Article 3 of the Treaty voted on and approved by all."

"If this strategy is firmly embraced by all Member States and by European civil society, it would allow us to embark on a virtuous economic, social, environmental and institutional path of renewal for the future."



This is not the time for resignation and depression, and even less a time for spreading fears and destructive envy.

It is instead the time of betting on life, on the ability to dare, to risk, to dream. Time is not tomorrow, it's today. It is the time of responsibility, of convergences and of strong alliances between the most diverse forces.

It is the time of a new emotional intelligence, of innovation and investment, of a new pact between the productive forces, between the generations and between the territories.

Instead of the extremes, we must manage to raise the 'voices of the good', as Sergio Mattarella, President of the Republic of Italy said recently.



Greta Thunberg

We are not fighting for the future of young generations, we are fighting for everybody's future

Greta spoke plainly when responding to President Jahier and speaking in front of **European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker**.

"We are striking from school because we have done our homework," said Thunberg, "we know that most politicians don't want to talk to us. Good. We don't want to talk to them either," she told a roomful of EU policymakers.

"We want them to talk to the scientists instead. Listen to them. Because we are just repeating what they are saying and have been saying for decades," she continued.

"We want you to follow the Paris Agreement and the IPCC reports. We don't have any other demands. Just unite behind the science – that is our demand."





European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker praised the tireless advocacy of Thunberg and others of her generation, hundreds of thousands of whom have captured the attention of the world – and their governments – by staging weekly climate strikes since December.

During his speech at the event, President Juncker pledged that 25% of EU funds will go to mitigating the effects of climate change in the next budgetary period. The EESC has asked for a minimum of 40% of the EU budget to be dedicated to sustainable development.

President Jahier reiterated his commitment to the 16-year-old activist and the other young people from all over Europe who joined her on stage, including: Anouna de Waever, Adélaïde Charlier, Kyra Gantois, Luisa Neubauer, Josefen Hoérée, Gilles Vandaele and Dries Cornelissens.



"For the good of our children we need to do it too. #Whateverittakes we will dare a sustainable Europe. We promise today to stay engaged for a real #rUnnaissance." The **European Committee of the Regions' President, Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, echoed the same commitment.

European Parliament President, Antonio Tajani, who was unable to attend, underlined in a message to the EESC President and members that *"we must listen more closely to our citizens if we are to provide effective responses to their problems."*

"The upcoming European elections are crucial and I urge everyone to vote. By voting, we can all make our voice heard more clearly in Europe, and defend this area of peace and freedom that is the envy of the entire world," he added.





Press conference with President Jahier and Greta Thunberg

More than 135 journalists were present during the event and at the press conference. The number of articles reporting on Greta at the EESC totalled 700 at the end of February.



Civil Society representatives give their vision for Europe's future

During a panel discussion with leaders of civil society organisations, both **BusinessEurope Director General, Markus Beyrer**, and **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) Secretary-General, Luca Visentini**, underlined the need to defend Europe. *"Only together we count in the world. Only if we stand together will we shape the global agenda,"* Beyrer said.



Luca Visentini stressed that European problems from multinational tax avoidance to climate change, social dumping and injustice require not national but also European solutions. He added that a new Social Contract should be established based on new economic policies that boost sustainable growth for all citizens, in line with the climate, environmental and social justice principles, and prioritising social needs as well as social demands.

CEEP Secretary-General, Valeria Ronzitti, also called on social partners and civil society organisations to be at the forefront of shaping the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, which is going to be so instrumental in developing a sustainable future. *"We can all together unite to preserve the social market economy. I think this is the key to preserving the Europe that we know today and that we want in the future,"* she added.

Similarly, **Luc Triangle, Secretary-General of IndustriALL**, stressed the need to work on upward social convergence if we want to reconnect with the millions of citizens and workers who increasingly see Europe as a threat, rather than an opportunity.

"We need to implement the Paris Agreement, we need to go for the energy transition, and we need to go for the zero carbon economy. These ambitious plans need to be accompanied with clear social policies."

Conny Reuter, co-President of the Liaison Group and Secretary-General of Solidar, was not shy in outlining the warning signals. *"We see that Europe is completely changing. We don't want this Europe to be in the hands of Salvinis, of Orbáns, of Kaczynskis. I am not a populist. I am saying this because I am worried, because there is fire in the house and there are not enough firefighters,"* he thundered. *"We have to defend the principles of living together, of living in democracy, of respecting minorities, of finding democratic compromises,"* he added, calling for a new era of civic engagement linked to the Sustainable Development Goals.

"We need to make sure that this young generation can continue to live on a peaceful European continent and continue to enjoy democracy, with social rights and civil rights. Moreover, as Willy Brandt said: this cannot be taken for granted, no, we have to fight for it" he insisted.

Annemie Driessens, President of COFACE Families Europe, also pushed for a strong defence of core democratic values.





A moment of Joy

In honour of President Jahier and his call for a rEUnaissance, mezzosoprano Valentina Volpe Andreatza and her team performed their work, **Euphonia**, mixing dance and music, post-industrial and Renaissance atmosphere. The world premiere of the “Vitruvian Europe”, composed by Marco Cazzuffi, was presented by the team.



Inspirational speakers take the floor

Immediately after the intermezzo, **Eva Maydell, President of European Movement International**, praised President Jahier’s agenda for rEUnaissance. *“It describes to a great extent what our tasks are today: to have a Europe where the citizens are its main focus and are put at the heart of our continent, and a Europe that does not leave anyone behind.”*

After Ms Maydell, other inspirational speakers followed:

Sneška Quaadvlieg-Mihailović, Secretary-General of Europa Nostra: *“Put culture and shared cultural heritage where they belong: at the heart of the entire European project. I want to thank Luca Jahier for challenging both civil society and the EU institutions to dream together to initiate a new rEUnaissance for Europe. Is this a utopian or realistic dream? We think that we can make this dream come true. The question is not whether we should have less or more Europe, the question is how we together can join forces to make Europe a better, more inclusive, more beautiful and more meaningful place to live for present and future generations.*

Let us show the world that our Europe is an enchanting theme with variations – that Europe stands for joy and not for fear. Let us put culture and education and especially our shared cultural heritage where they belong: at the heart of the entire European project.”

Anna Widegren, Secretary-General of the European Youth Forum: *“We have seen young people receive increased attention and have recognised the need to involve them. I could not agree more. Unfortunately, at many levels we still have a situation where leaders seem very keen on involving young people, but do not actually involve them. Europe is about tearing down barriers and creating a better world and young people are eager to shape the world we live in.*

The path that young people want for Europe is clear. This path is one of a Europe where young people are not at risk of ending up worse off than their parents. A Europe where resources are spent in a sustainable way, in which public governance does not systemically exclude them and in which human rights are not the privilege of a few. A Europe where not just 0.5% of parliamentarians are under the age of 30. Our generation will have to find solutions to some of the world’s most challenging problems, such as an aging population, social division, climate change and technological revolutions.

Reach out to young people because young people do want to engage.”

Second panel debate with leaders of civil society organisations highlighted the need for a new paradigm



Jouni Nissinen, President of the European Environmental Bureau, stressed that since 1970, humanity has wiped out 60% of the animal population – i.e. three out of every five wild animals – and that the future EU we want can only be achieved if we address the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and chemicals.

Arnaldo Abruzzini, CEO of Eurochambres, Josef Středula, President of the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (CMKOS) and Véronique Willems, Secretary-General of SME United, underlined the need to deliver on citizens' expectations and to bring real added value to their work and lives.

Katja Lehto-Komulainen, Deputy Secretary-General of the ETUC, argued that there are a lot of dangerous things in the world, but one of the most dangerous is the silence of wise people and failure to take action.

"We want a fairer Europe. For us this means: democracy, justice, just transitions. What we really need are measures that really boost fairer wages, upward convergence, and quality employment."

More inspirational speakers take the floor

Madeleine Kay (aka EU Super Girl) is a superhero for Europe who fights against the evils of populism, nationalism and apathy and strives to communicate a positive pro-EU narrative and inspirational vision for the future of Europe through art, music, literature and performance.

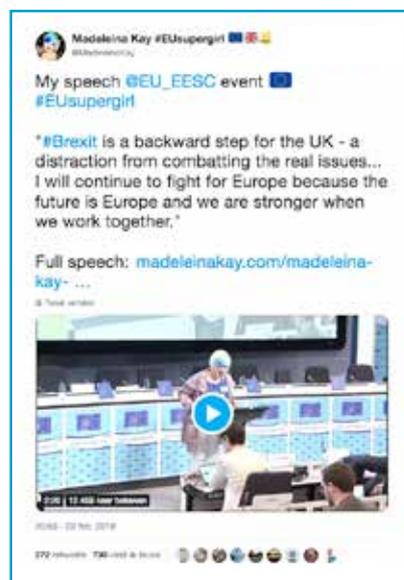


Kay stressed that the problem does not just exist in the UK, but across all of Europe. She warned against sitting idle and encouraged instead examining BREXIT to reflect upon what needs to change to prevent a reoccurrence in other Member States.

"The truth is that people do not realise how imperative the EU is to their quality of life. So, we must ask ourselves what have we been doing wrong and what can we do better in the future to alter public perception of the EU?"

If young people do not make the effort to stand up for Europe, they are handing power over to the populists, she insisted.

Considering BREXIT a stumbling block in achieving our European dream, she stressed it was a distraction from tackling the real issues such as education, healthcare, criminal justice, providing jobs and opportunities, achieving equality and combatting climate change. *"The future is Europe and we are stronger when we work together"* she concluded.





The closing panel

The closing panel brought together presidents of national economic and social councils, including **Tiziano Treu (CNEL, Italy)**, **Lalko Dulevski (ESC, Bulgaria)**, **John Bencini (MCESD, Malta)** and **Carole Couvert (ESEC, France)**.

The two central areas when it comes to the European promise are a fair social model that provides opportunities for everybody and sustainable growth, said Tiziano Treu. There is no alternative to investing more in social infrastructure, healthcare, education and housing.

"Without a functioning economy, we have nothing. We have huge opportunities offered by the technologies of the future, if we can invest in this area with common programmes," he added.

"We shouldn't just look for more Europe but for a better Europe", echoed Carole Couvert.

According to Lalko Dulevski, the reEUnaissance can be treated as a return to humanitarian values, accompanied by innovation. The focus is on innovation, which we will need in order to preserve the European Union.

EESC Vice-Presidents Isabel Caño Aguilar and Milena Angelova closed the morning by highlighting the campaign #ThisTimeImVoting. The EU must be defended. Our force is our voice, our vote, said Ms Caño Aguilar.



Afternoon session: participants took part in seven round table workshops

As part of its **Civil Society for rEUnaissance** conference on 21 February, the EESC organised **seven parallel thematic workshops, focusing on seven issues that will be decisive for the future of Europe.**

The panels, which gathered together some 230 people, saw EESC members and other participants discuss how to mobilise civil society in the run-up to the European elections. What Europe do we want to see emerge from the elections was the basic question running through the discussions.

The workshops focused on the following issues:

- **Why favourable conditions for European business are good for all citizens**
- **How to strengthen EU as a global economic player**
- **Overcoming inequalities: investing in a more sustainable Europe**
- **A European Union Agenda on the future of work**
- **European values and fundamental rights: a key for the European Union of tomorrow**
- **Turning the next generation into European citizens through civic education**
- **Peace and culture : tools for strengthening the European project**

The questions sparked lively discussions among the many participating civil society organisations, who provided a wealth of input.

Overall, there was consensus that Europe needed to make a qualitative leap in communication to better bring home to ordinary citizens the real benefits the EU has brought for them and to showcase its success stories.

At the same time, it also needed to take a critical look at some of its policies against a background of increasing poverty and inequalities, international competition and the fear of the impact of widespread digitalisation. A new, more sustainable economic model taking the Sustainable Development Goals as its compass was called for.

The need to develop a European cultural identity through education, to encourage Europeans to take ownership of their multiple identities and help them to realise that they can be proud to be Europeans without betraying their local roots was prominent in discussions. The key role of European values in shaping identity and the need to hold on to these values, which are now coming under threat, was also a recurrent theme.

The findings and conclusions of these workshops are available on the EESC website: www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/civil-society-reunnaissance





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Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99
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