

## **Liaison Group - Civil Society Organisations**

Record of proceedings  
Meeting of 7 September 2016

### **1. Opening remarks**

The Liaison Group Co-chair, Conny Reuter, opened the meeting and invited participants to a short 'tour de table', during which all representatives from NGOs stated the key issues and activities of particular importance to their organization.<sup>1</sup>

Pierluigi Brombo (EESC, LG secretariat), invited participants to keep the LG secretariat informed of conferences and activities of their respective organizations, so they can be included in the Liaison Group newsletter.

### **2. European Semester, Europe 2020 and Pillar of social rights**

Philippe Cuisson (EESC, PAS unit) quickly introduced Europe 2020 as a macroeconomic agenda aiming to incite economic growth. However, new policy agendas have recently arisen which also warrant attention (environmental problems, United Nations SDGs, Brexit, etc.).

Juri Soosaar (EESC, Europe 2020 secretariat) gave a short presentation on Europe 2020 and the European Semester, as well as on the related Integrated Report currently being produced. He called for the LG's contribution to Europe 2020 by end of October, so it can be ready for discussion at the Steering Committee in November.

Mr Reuter proposed to establish a small working group of interested organisations to draft the contribution of the LG to Europe 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex.

Dominique Guibert emphasized the importance of calling into question the austerity measures. He recalled that there are two indicators of extreme importance to European society that have not advanced in the past years and which should have: employment and poverty.

Luk Zelderloo spoke of the complexity of the European Semester process. He pointed out that structural funds are only used in the implementation of country specific recommendations, which do not leave much room for social issues. Furthermore, the social sector is the only one that has created new jobs over the past 5 years; it should be mentioned as a source for growth and innovation and more of the European Fund for Structural Investment should go into this sector.

Mr Zelderloo also invited those present to an event at the European Parliament the following day whose aim was to bridge the gap between the European Fund for Structural Investment and the social sector.

### **3. Financing of NGOs**

Mr Reuter invited everyone to look at the documents made available and contact Ms Carlotta Besozzi, for questions or comments. He emphasized the reticence of conservatives in the EP to fund NGOs and the importance of following this issue closely.

Christian Weger (EESC, LG secretariat) gave some background information on the procedure. A study is being commissioned and will be published in the end of October; the MEPs own-initiative report is scheduled for February 2017.

Maria Orejas (EFC) agreed with Mr Reuter and stated that her organization would be glad to provide comments on the documents and send regular information and updates on this matter.

No working group was set up for this issue.

### **4. European Pillar of Social Rights**

Mr Reuter informed members about a working group in the EESC whose three co-rapporteurs are incidentally the presidents of each of the three groups of the Committee. The group is working towards a common position, though there may be points of contention. The discussion is still in a relatively early stage; when a reference document is ready, it will be made available to the members of the LG for comments.

Mr Reuter emphasised that the Social Pillar shall not be a "placebo", but an important tool and opportunity for the EU to show that social progress is possible, and mentioned a hearing in the EP the previous week. The rapporteur, Maria Joao Rodrigues, is an ally to civil society and will help ensure their voice is heard.

Davide Lanzilotti stated that the IUT has replied to the consultation and raised concerns about how the European Commission has defined the principle of how to apply the right to housing.

On 27 January 2017, the Commission will organize a conference which will conclude the consultation process. Mr Reuter requested the EESC secretariat to provide a list of the dates of consultations taking place in the member states organised by EESC.

## **5. Transparency register**

Mr Brombo informed the members that a new communication would be adopted by the European Commission on 28 September and suggested to invite the Commission to present the new register at the next meeting of the LG.

Marta Pont stated that her organization replied to the public consultation on the Transparency register. They believe the register should be made compulsory, including for the Council, and that more information should be disclosed. They also suggested that there should be a one stop shop portal where all the meetings with different staffers at the EC and EP can be found.

As someone whose organisation is not actively involved in this discussion, Ms Orejas requested the organizations that have that as a main agenda to facilitate the information to the LG.

Emma Klever's organization replied to the consultation and met with someone from Commissioner Timmermans' cabinet who is working on this issue, but they are not very optimistic about what will be presented on 28 September.

## **6. LG Working Programme 2017**

Mr Brombo recalled the importance of a programme setting out the guidelines for the LG's work in the next few months and allowing for a broader view of the LG's activities.

Mr Weger explained that the current draft aims at moving away from ad hoc contributions and focuses on issues of transcending importance to NGOs.

Mr Guibert expressed concern that the document's current structure gives the impression that the LG is going back to institutional functioning and moving away from politics and policies. He urged the LG to make sure it is known that it will keep focusing on political, economic and social issues, as well as institutional ones.

Mr Reuter agreed with Mr Guibert, but stressed the importance of the institutional side, as it is the link between civil society and with the EU Institutions, aiming for a balance between the institutional and political sides. He concluded this point by requesting volunteers to contribute to the Working Programme to be presented to the LG for adoption.

Mr Reuter recalled that the Riga Roadmap should not be set aside and therefore the draft document should also reflect the state of affairs in relation to civil dialogue. In the long run, this work could feed into the yearly Civil Society Days and results could be presented as a sort of 'State of Civil Dialogue', for example in the exchanges with the Committee and the Commission.

The secretariat will redraft the document taking into account these comments.

## **7. Civil Society Days 2017 and Civil Society event on the future of Europe**

Mr Reuter briefly informed the group of the idea to hold a conference devoted to Brexit, which was raised in the common statement of the two co-presidents in July. However, discussions in the house have not yet led to a common agreement on this.

Mr Zelderloo underlined the importance of organizing an event with a positive approach focussing on the future and on accomplishments instead of putting the focus on Brexit negotiations.

Oonagh Aitken proposed to turn the issues and problems that arose during the Brexit debate into a positive discussion on what CSOs could do about them.

Ms Orejas stressed the importance of constructing a positive narrative: the LG should focus on solutions being implemented by CSOs. However, she believes that there should be a political

message to reinforce the role and importance of CSOs and, as such, the importance of allowing them to develop or survive.

Mr Reuter stressed the importance of securing a budget for the Civil Society Days to ensure a somewhat more equal representation of participants from all member states, even those which are farther from Brussels.

## **8. Composition**

Mr Brombo presented the possible introduction of alternates, underlining that these are not to be merely considered replacements for full members but they allow for enlarging the LG and complementing the views of its members.

Some points could not be discussed due to the absence of members with a bigger interest in them (such as the classification of EFIL).

Mr Brombo also raised the question of whether it was appropriate to have ENOP as an alternate to the European Foundation Center. Ms Orejas will follow up on this with Mr Brombo.

The question of including political foundations was left to further examination.

## **9. Other business**

Contact should be taken with the cabinet of the EESC President to set a date for the formal LG meeting which should take place before the end of the year. Prior to that, another informal LG-CSO meeting should discuss the elements of the LG Work Programme.

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## ANNEX – key issues for CSOs

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### AEDH – Dominique Guibert

- Migration and refugees – proposals by the Commission being submitted to the Council and Parliament
- Social issues – discussions surrounding the Social Pillar
- State of democracy in the member states

### IUT – Davide Lanzilotti

- EU urban agenda
- Action Plan of the housing partnership
- Promotion of corporate and social responsibility in the housing sector
- Revision of the Energy Directives – all directives having a link with energy efficiency in housing

### European Movement International– Emma Klever

- Advocacy feeding into the Verhofstadt Report
- Plans for a future Europe
- Own resources – high level conferences

### European Citizen Action Service – Marta Pont

- Study on the impact of the possible scenarios of Brexit on citizens' rights
- Contribution for the Europe for Citizens Programme
- Study on the harmonization of ID documents and residency cards
- Digital democracy

### Lifelong Learning Platform – Brikena Xhomaqi

- Skills agenda – especially civil and social competences, policy recommendations for social inclusion
- Action plan for the integration of third country nationals
- Annual Lifelong Learning week at the EP – topics include: migration, validation of non-formal competences, skills agenda, employment
- Erasmus + program midterm review and implementation reports

### European Volunteer Centre – Gabriella Civico

- Volunteering as a way to promote inclusion and prevent extremism
- Studies on volunteering with refugees – integration of refugees and emergency relief provided by volunteers
- Funding for volunteer
- How volunteering works on the skills agenda
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning

### Volunteering matters – Oonagh Aitken

- Volunteering as an act of citizenship

- Mobilizing young people – young people's response to democratic deficit
- Intergenerational solidarity in the context of Brexit
- Volunteering as a tool for cohesion to break down barriers for disadvantaged groups
- Migrants – especially young migrants
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European Foundation Centre – Maria Orejas

- Migration – integration of migrants
- Citizen participation
- Funding of NGOs – shrinking space for civil society

European Civic Forum – Jan Robert Suesser

- Evolution of the notion of citizenship by citizens
- Democracy
- Inclusive citizenship – inclusion of citizens in the political debate

European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities – Luk Zelderloo

- Social service providers
- Task force on migration and immigration – migrants with disabilities and migrants who develop psycho-social disabilities
- European cooperation in the wake of increasing Euroscepticism

EESC – Roman Haken

- Partnership between CSOs and EU institutions

COFACE – Paola Panzeri

- Post Brexit Future of Europe
- Radicalization of young people
- Financing of NGOs
- Social contribution of youth organizations
- EU pillar of social rights – social inclusion of young people

SOLIDAR – Conny Reuter

- Pillar of Social Rights
- Shrinking civil society space
- European neighbourhood policies – particularly MENA region
- Empowerment of civil society
- Skills and competencies – integration of migrants in the labour market
- Democracy
- Nationalism/Euroscepticism – need for an European voice/approach