



**Liaison  
Group**

*European Economic and Social Committee*

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

Minutes of the meeting

7 May 2019, 10.30 a.m.-13 p.m., JDE 63

**Participants:** Conny Reuter (Solidar/Co-chair of the LG), Jeremy Wates (European Environmental Bureau), Andrea Witt (Eurochild), Andrew Todd (Lifelong Learning Platform), Vladimir Sestovic (European Civic Forum), Alexandrina Najmowicz (European Civic Forum), Katja Reuter (Social Platform), Marie-Céline Falisse (European Federation for Intercultural Learning), Kornelia Kiss (Culture Action Europe), María Orejas (European Foundation Centre), Luk Zelderloo (European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities), Luca Lóth (European Volunteer Centre), Maciej Kucharczyk (AEDH), Barbara Steenberger (International Union of Tenants), Laura de Bonfils (Volonteuropa), Flavio Grazian (ECAS), Katherine Heid (President's Cabinet), Corina Stratulat (European Policy Centre), Pierluigi Brombo, Karen Serafini, Marie-Hélène Lahaye, Joan Cabré (EESC secretariat LG).

**Apologies for absence received:** Lonne Poissonnier (CONCORD), Victor Meseguer (Social Economy Europe), Marie-Noël Neven (RED), Dirk Jarré (EURAG), Annemie Drieskens (COFACE).

### **Welcome by Conny Reuter**

The Liaison Group co-chair, Conny Reuter, opened the meeting and after a round of presentations, he commented on some of the challenges in the coming months for Europe in general and for organised civil society in particular. In his view, there was a reality in Europe that was vastly different from the large, macroeconomic numbers highlighted by the politicians. In addition, there were huge challenges to contend with, such as the anti-democratic and demagogic movements that were gaining strength in Europe. In his words, now was time to speak out against all these developments.

### **Citizens' consultations and the role of civil society organisations**

Corina Stratulat (European Policy Centre) shared some introductory reflections on the European Citizens' Consultations (ECC) carried out by the EU institutions in 2018-2019 (see the enclosed draft version of her speech). A report on the process, would be circulated to LG members as soon as possible.

Her remarks were followed by an exchange of views in which Andrew Todd, Vladimir Sestovic, Katja Reuter, Alexandrina Najmowicz, Kornelia Kiss and Maciej Kucharczyk took part. They raised questions

regarding data collection during the consultation events, the follow-up of the recommendations and the effectiveness of the different methodical procedures. Some of the participants made no secret of their scepticism towards the initiative, notably on account of the risk it could pose to civil dialogue and the role of CSOs.

### **Update on Civil Society Days**

Pierluigi Brombo then took the floor to present and explain the programme of the Civil Society Days (12-13 June). He asked the organisers of different workshops present to explain briefly the topic of their workshop. For this purpose, Vladimir Sestovic, Kornelia Kiss and Conny Reuter took the floor.

Conny Reuter then pointed out that the dates of the event had been decided in advance so that they would strategically fit into the electoral process that Europe would be going through.

Marie H  l  ne Lahaye and Pierluigi Brombo subsequently commented on this year's innovation, namely the extension of the Civil Society Days to events to be held in some European cities. In this sense, they announced a kind of partnership with a sustainability event in Rome and a civil society event in Bucharest.

Kornelia Kiss regretted that participants from eastern Europe were not better represented. Conny Reuter drew the meeting's attention to the fact that an organisation from Poland would be present at the opening, and that a person from Turkey would also be attending. He also reminded those present that financial resources for the organisation of this conference and the invitation of people from outside Brussels were limited.

Jeremy Wates underlined that at the present time it was crucial to give messages that were as powerful as possible.

Maria Orejas also commented on the lack of funding for participation by national member organisations in the Civil Society Days. In this regard, Pierluigi Brombo explained that this year the dates of the Civil Society Days had been decided well in advance (in November 2018) precisely in order to allow the organisation of events and general assemblies of LG members to be held close to the Civil Society Days, thus facilitating the attendance of LG national members from other countries.

### **Update on cooperation with the EESC**

Conny Reuter set out some aspects concerning relations with the EESC. In particular he referred to his participation in the February plenary session, in his capacity as a Group expert contributing to the drafting of an EESC opinion on Sibiu and beyond, as well as his meeting with EESC section presidents, from which he had received tangible proposals for making the work of the Liaison Group better known within the Committee.

### **Update on the reorganisation of the Liaison Group**

Finally, the possible reorganisation and enlargement of the Liaison Group was discussed. Two documents drawn up by the secretariat were presented: one giving an overview of the areas of work covered by organisations that were currently part of the Group, the other presenting a list containing proposals put forward by organisations that could be contacted to be part of the Group.

Barbara Steenberger expressed her misgivings regarding the fact that her organisation had been included under the heading of "Sustainability", as she considered its scope to be much broader. Mr Reuter and the secretariat drew her attention to the fact that this was a document for internal guidance only, that no part of it would be communicated outside the LG and that it did not limit in any way an organisation's capacity to work actively in the full range of LG activities.

Jeremy Wates questioned the idea of expanding the number of LG member organisations and the logic or strategy behind this decision.

Conny Reuter reminded him that it was just a proposal and that nothing had been decided on.

### **Any other business**

Jeremy Wates said he was pleasantly surprised that sustainability issues seemed to have definitely made a place for themselves among the most important issues on the current European agenda. Barbara Steenberger took the opportunity to recall that a new ECI called "Housing 4 all" had been registered. Karen Serafini commented that this would be clearly reflected in the next edition of the Liaison Group's newsletter. Flavio Grazian agreed with Jeremy Wates as to the need to keep up the momentum in this interesting period of European politics. Katja Reuter also pleaded for this momentum to be used, and remarked that Social Platform was, together with the next Finnish presidency, preparing an event related to the economy of well-being.

In his closing statement, Conny Reuter made a reference to the forthcoming European elections, stating that there was not only a fight between pro-Europeans and anti-Europeans, but also that there was a need for a real debate on different European projects.