



IN MEMORIAM

Brussels, 22.3.2016



Message from the President of the EESC

Dear friends,

The refugee crisis has laid bare the lack of solidarity among our Member States and the urgent need to establish a truly European policy on migration and asylum. Our Committee has reiterated this concern in its recently-published reports, following missions that were carried out in many Member States and Turkey.

The European Union is being severely criticised—much more so than in the past. It is clear that the very process of European integration is in serious jeopardy. The rhetoric of populists and xenophobes is finding favour with increasing numbers of people. As I write, the latest indications of this trend can be witnessed in the results of the Austrian elections. **To my mind, those who claim that the solution to these problems lies in retreating into nationalism are, in the best case scenario, committing a terrible mistake: they are acting as if European history has taught them nothing.** But it gets worse. There are those who deliberately foster hatred, racism and xenophobia, while concealing their intention to suppress freedom and impose authoritarian or even totalitarian regimes in the event of a return to nationalism.

Those who came before us knew the horrors of war and left us a wonderful legacy: the European Community, which has enabled us to live in peace for seven decades. We cannot allow racism and fascism to destroy our community like viruses. We must act to convince the public that civil society organisations represent their interests and that only a genuine, democratic, close-knit and mutually-supportive Union will be capable of dealing not only with these problems, but with all the other major issues we are set to face in a globalised world as well. If things go wrong, it would be bad for everyone; nobody would be safe. If we rest on our laurels today, our children will not forgive us.

There is cause for hope, but plenty of courage and hard work is needed if that hope is to be transformed into reality. As perhaps you already know, the Committee has just been called upon by the Commission to draw up an opinion on the «European Pillar of Social Rights». We have set up a working group made up of 21 members, with the presidents of our three groups acting as rapporteurs. We will deploy innovative means to seek out the opinions of our national organisations, by visiting each of our Member States in turn. You, who know how the Committee works, will understand how utterly crucial this task is to us. I am hopeful that we will deliver a proposal to the Commission that is worthy of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, fully reflects the concerns of our organisations and can provide the public with a sign of positive change that has their needs at heart.

More than ever, our Committee must convince policy makers to make decisions promoting a European Union based on solidarity and the needs of the public. I am sure that you, the former members of our Committee who are well aware of what is at stake, will be willing to support us via the national organisations in which you have been or remain active. To me, you will always be European social partners, just as you were when you were full members of the Committee, and we need to work together if we are to continue our fight for a truly united Europe, based on solidarity and social values.

Georges Dassis, President of the EESC

Editorial by the AFM President



Dear members,

Our annual general assembly was held on 11 April at the Committee building in Brussels. Many people attended, despite the closure of Brussels Airport following the horrific and cowardly attacks not just against Belgium, but against all freedom and peace-loving peoples.

During the assembly, we approved the annual report and the auditor's report for the financial year 2015, as well as the budget proposals for 2016. We also held a long debate on possible amendments to the association's charter and the cooperation agreement with the EESC, with a view to presenting them to the Committee Bureau. The main focus of the afternoon was a wide-ranging debate on the future of Europe, with participation and notable contributions from: Nikos Alexopoulos, Head of EESC President Georges Dassis's Private Office; Luis Planas, secretary-general of the EESC; Luca Jahier, President of Group III (who has published an interesting article in this newsletter); Antonello Pezzini, quaestor; and José Antonio Moreno Díaz, Group II rapporteur on refugees and migrants. This topical debate was rich and extensive, and above all highlighted some of the challenges we face.

For years we have been caught in a stalemate that over time has caused the European project to stall and even to move into reverse. The risks posed by this stalemate have prompted us to react and to formulate recommendations for proposals and actions that have the potential to break the deadlock. This is what we have endeavoured to achieve via our contribution to the debate on the future of Europe.

The latest developments, statements and stances, on the part of certain Member States in particular, are a cause for concern, as they deviate from the European project and its underlying values. The EU has lost credibility for several reasons: it was unable to take the joint decisions that were necessary in the face of the crisis; it allowed economic and social policies to deteriorate; and it watched Greece crumble without proposing alternative, more integrated policies that could have provided a long-term solution. Following on from Greece, we were faced with Brexit, terrorism, difficult TTIP negotiations, doubts over the potential repercussions of building a NATO military base in Poland, the need to develop economic and social policies which meet the needs of citizens, the fight against unemployment, and much more. At the same time, while everything is pushing us to pull together, there are major internal problems. For example, the refugee crisis is causing deep divisions between us, aggravated by the inexorable rise of nationalist populism with xenophobic and racist undertones.

In order to get the EU back on track, we need to review the issue as a whole, both on an institutional and a political level, while at the same time acknowledging the difficulties and obstacles that are preventing institutions from functioning, and the predominance of states more concerned with personal gain than with pursuing common policies. The debate has been ongoing for years, from Jacques Delors to Hans-Dietrich Genscher and, not to go too far back, to the proposals made by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. All these people shared the same vision of more integrated European policymaking, which they believed (and I fully agree), was the only way to revitalise Europe and restore its chances of genuinely existing. The EU 28 has shown its limits. Moreover, it is proving ineffec-



Message from the Secretary General of the EESC

Dear members,

The General Assembly held on 25 January was a welcome opportunity for me to meet you for the first time in this new term, and to stress once again the valuable contribution that the Association of Former Members has to make to the activities of the EESC.

As I said on that occasion, some of you might agree that the EU has never experienced such difficult times, caused by a wide range of factors and disturbances. The migration and refugee issue is a major challenge for the EU, which we must tackle with European principles and values, and I would like to highlight the excellent work which has been carried out by EESC members through their various missions in the EU and Turkey. Another great challenge is posed by security, terrorism and safety. We have to work together closely and foster cooperation and unanimous action, or our response will not be sufficient. We also have to ensure better coordination of police and intelligence services and judicial systems. And, last but certainly not least, we must support the idea of freedom as embodied by the Schengen area.

The EESC is trying to provide responses to these new situations with the help of the Secretariat. **Since I took up my duties as secretary-general of the EESC I have started an administrative reform to support EESC members more and more effectively.** The EESC has always been an advisory body serving the EU institutions and will continue to play this role. But the EESC also has a clear role to play as the platform for EU civil society, and this is a very important part of its future. As the home of civil society, the EESC organises various events, which are great opportunities for discussion and bringing new ideas to the fore.

We recently decided to include another element on the list of the EESC's principal activities: assessment of and follow-up to EU policies. This ex-post qualitative work will be carried out by the members with the support of the Secretariat, as something new but potentially very important. Following my proposal, the Bureau has changed the shape of the EESC Secretariat. A new unit in charge of ex-post evaluation has been created, while at the same time other units have been removed from the organisation chart, to make sure that this creative process will not entail any increase in administrative expenditure. Needless to say, responding to the new challenge of carrying out qualitative ex-post evaluation in the interinstitutional environment will be of paramount importance for the EESC.

It will be my pleasure to keep you informed of the first tangible results of these activities. For the time being, let me conclude by thanking you for your work and pledging once again the full support and goodwill of the EESC Secretariat.

Luis Planas, Secretary General of the EESC

IN THIS ISSUE

BERLAYMONT & Co.:

To be or not to be in the EU?.....	4
Good ideas from the Slovak presidency	6
Energy labelling	11

JDE INSIDER:

From field to fork	12
Living Colours.....	14
Your Europe your Say.....	15
The European Citizens' Initiative Day.....	16

AFM FORUM:

The AFM General Assembly	18
Discover south-east France	21
A simulation game to make the EESC known	22
Europe's crises	24

RAVENSTEIN MEMORIES:

When the EESC met King Baudoin	28
--------------------------------------	----

tive to base the running of the EU around the concept of nation states. I would also like to add that this concept is highly corrosive and is the root cause of all our deadlocks.

We therefore urgently need to revise the entire institutional architecture, the way it operates and its suitability for more integrated policymaking. The time has come to enable those who want to move forward towards a more integrated Europe, characterised by solidarity and capable of meeting the legitimate expectations of its citizens, to do so, while at the same time conserving the EU 28's rules and acquis. Unless there is change or commitment on our part, we will become helpless witnesses in the face of disillusionment and deterioration in intra-EU relations, which could result in the slow and fatal erosion of the EU project.

The debate that followed the presentation highlighted a shared concern and, despite some reservations, a genuine commitment to continuing the discussion, as well as formulating areas for development and proposals for adapting and strengthening the Union through new dimensions and with renewed prospects. In any case, it is always pleasant and refreshing to have an assembly that is open to debate without prejudice or preconceptions.

It is now up to us, in our capacity as members of the association, to make our ideas and proposals heard, including those that are more sceptical, and to move forward by boldly committing ourselves to the process that has been set in motion.

Roger Briesch, President of the AFM

THE UK REFERENDUM ON EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERSHIP

To be or not to be in the EU? That is the question...

"The reason why the EU project will hold together is because it is a noble cause, it is the right thing for Europe. The EESC is part of the European Demos which is emerging in the EU". With these words Will Hutton, Chair of the Big Innovation Centre, Principal of Hertford College at Oxford University and former Editor-in-chief of *The Observer* launched the debate at a conference in Manchester on 8 March. Moderated by Shirin Wheeler, former presenter of the BBC programme 'The Record Europe', the Various Interests Group brought together some 130 participants to debate 'The UK in the EU: What Matters to You?'

With speakers from academia and think tanks, the voluntary and environmental sectors, social enterprises, trade unions, local and national authorities and our Members, it has to be said that our event stimulated one of the liveliest discussions that we have ever had at a thematic conference of our Group. Whether speaking about jobs, growth, economic and social cohesion, security, sovereignty and identity, or whether discussing the 'Morning After' and the consequences of a majority vote to leave the EU, one thread of thought was common throughout: the referendum on 23 June will be about *people* and people's *quality of lives*. Arguably for this reason, despite the facts and the partisan political dimension to the *Leave/Remain* campaigns, the discussants agreed that most UK citizens will vote based on their *emotions*. **It is the sentiments, the perceptions, the fears and the passions, it is the values to be passed on to the next generation which will ultimately determine the referendum result.** We could call it 'project hope', for the European Union is a common journey for the development of our society, for justice and dignity. However, this journey is not without challenges.

Indeed, the UK is not the only Member State which believes that the *EU* today *needs to be deeply reformed*. On the contrary, what is becoming increasingly clear is that the decisions on Britain's special relationship

with the EU are just the pinnacle of increasing anxiety, mistrust and disunity felt both by politicians and citizens, in several European countries. For like it or not, we are all trying to navigate through multiple crises at Europe's doorstep – the challenges of migration, security, weak economic growth, increasing poverty, climate change, etc. There is no doubt in my mind, that the failure to manage the migration crisis could be the undoing of the EU, for there is so much to do and it is urgent!

There is also no doubt that we must do more to increase transparency and competitiveness in Europe, create more quality jobs and stimulate sustainable growth. However, the placing of barbed wire across Europe's borders, more than 25 years after we tore them down in 1989,

is not the solution. It is only the physical expression of fear, mistrust and national isolationism.

This brings me to the second point that I wanted to make, which relates to the future of the EU as a whole. The decision to exempt the UK from 'ever closer union' and indeed the many opt-out clauses that the UK already enjoys, are a clear illustration that Europe's identity is and can only be that of a *differentiated* and *multi-speed body*. It would be politically naïve to continue to believe in a single objective or model for the EU, realised at the same time and in

exactly the same way by all 28 Member States. This is not something new. Already in June 2014 the European Council formally accepted the concept of variable integration. However, the recent agreement of the European Council makes this differentiation much more explicit and is intended to be legally binding. Crucially, the agreement with the UK on 'ever closer union' could help to overcome longstanding differences on the future direction of the EU. Those Member States that wish to build an 'ever closer union' are free to do so, moving faster and closer in their integration. But those who do not wish to pursue this avenue are also free to put a brake on, *as regards their individual country*.





© Shutterstock: freedex

In my view, this is the only way forward. For the EU is by its very nature constantly balancing national interest, with common interest and compromise. It has been doing this since its inception. Indeed, this is surely what Winston Churchill had in mind in 1946, when giving his famous speech in Zurich.

When asked what could be the remedy from saving Europe from “infinite misery”, he replied *“It is to recreate the European fabric...and to provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, safely and freedom. Therefore I say to you, let Europe arise!”*

In 2016 we need to build a new narrative for Europe, in order to respond to the challenges that we jointly face today. With the insecurity and multitude of conflicts at Europe’s borders, be it in Turkey, Libya, Eastern Ukraine, etc., it is imperative that we protect this European space of peace, freedom, prosperity, justice and dignity. Above all, we must remain human and close to the European project and its fundamental values.

Almost five centuries ago, William Shakespeare wrote: “All the world’s a stage” and life is a play that we must enact. On 23 June, UK citizens will be the principal actors! So *“To be, or not to be”* a Member of the European Union? That is the question! Personally, I stand firmly in the camp ‘To Be’ in the EU. I am a fan of ‘#UK-IN’!

Luca Jahier, *President of the Various Interests Group*

In 2016 we need to build a new narrative for Europe, in order to respond to the challenges that we jointly face today.

THE SLOVAK PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Good Ideas from Slovakia



KEY INFORMATION AND DATES

- **Slovakia will assume for the first time in its history the presidency of the Council of the EU**
- **Dates:** 1 July 2016 -31 December 2016
- **Previous EU presidency:** Netherlands (1 January 2016 – 30 June 2016)
- **Following EU presidency:** Malta (1 January 2017 – 30 June 2017)
- **Slovak government plenipotentiary:** Ivan Korčok, Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to the EU
- **Presidency's budget projection:** €70 million

THE SLOVAK PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU AND ITS AIMS

This July, Slovakia will begin its first six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union. Slovakia's tenure at the helm of the Council will be the EU's 116th rotating presidency, preceded by the current Dutch presidency and followed by the Maltese presidency.

The Slovak presidency will focus on a number of questions of particular importance to the EU, such as the single market, the energy union, the cohesion policy, the capital markets union, the midterm review of the MFF 2014-2020, the annual EU budget for 2017 and enlargement.

In addition to long-planned agenda items, the migration crisis, a revision of the Dublin regulations and the counterterrorism will also be high on the agenda. Moreover, the issues that Slovakia will address during its presidency will reflect other developments, including the results of the UK's EU referendum.

Public interest in EU affairs in Slovakia is the lowest it has ever been within the EU. The presidency will be an opportunity to engage with the public on European issues and Slovakia's role in the EU.

Cooperation between the EESC and the presidency is quite intense. The Slovak government has requested four exploratory opinions from the Committee on the following topics:

- the impact of technological developments on the social security system and labour law;
- the midterm evaluation of Horizon 2020;
- the new electricity market design and potential impacts on vulnerable consumers; and
- future-proof regulation.

The extraordinary meeting of the EESC Bureau will take place on 14 June in Bratislava.

The final version of the programme of the Slovak presidency will be adopted in June. It will be presented by Ivan Korčok, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, during the EESC's July plenary session on 13 July.

Marián Brestovanský (REL)

By driving a positive agenda, Slovakia hopes to overcome a sense of fragmentation

CONNECT was speaking to Peter Javorčík, Slovakia's Permanent Representative to the EU

In your view, what are the biggest challenges that the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU is likely to face?

Slovakia is taking up the presidency at a difficult time. In the past couple of years, the European Union has been faced with a number of challenges that affect its overall shape. We observe a certain sense of political fragmentation and this must be a concern. Fragmentation makes us vulnerable.

However, Slovakia is not going to spread defeatism. On the contrary, we are set to approach current challenges from a positive angle. Our priorities will centre around four ambitions – to make the European economy stronger; to modernise and broaden the single market in areas such as energy and the digital economy; to work towards sustainable migration and a sustainable asylum policy; and to pay attention to our external environment, namely trade deals and enlargement policy.

There will be a clear common denominator for these priority areas. Firstly, we aim to overcome fragmentation – by focusing on a positive agenda and sustainable solutions. Secondly, we are determined to deliver tangible results for our citizens.

Of course, we are also aware of uncertainties that we have to take into consideration, namely the UK referendum and the migration situation on the ground. We hope, however, that the Slovak Presidency will not be fully taken up by crisis management.

The Presidency is an opportunity to promote Slovakia and its diplomatic potential. What results would you consider a success when passing the torch to Malta at the end of the year?

In each and every area, we have a clear vision of what we want to deliver. For instance, the European Fund for Strategic Investments and the Capital Markets Union are some of the flagships in the first priority area. Proposals enhancing energy security or enabling barrier-free e-commerce are high on our agenda in the second priority area. Smart borders are an example of important issues in the area of sustainable migration. And so on.

On top of this, however, it will be essential to create a positive atmosphere around the table and we are set to do that, too.

I believe this is also the way to contribute to that bigger picture – our efforts to overcome a sense of political fragmentation in the EU.



Which area, currently problematic in the EU, is of the utmost importance for Slovakia from a purely national perspective?

This may seem a cliché but the Presidency's role is that of an honest broker. Any country, including Slovakia, puts its national interests and sensitivities aside in order to serve as a credible manager, negotiator, mediator and so on. I am convinced that the Presidency is also a service to others and a way to contribute to the EU. One thing I can say from a national perspective – we really hope that the Presidency will also result in greater engagement on EU affairs with our public. Much is being done in this area as well.

Natália Schneiderová (GRE) contributed to this article.

In each and every area, we have a clear vision of what we want to deliver.

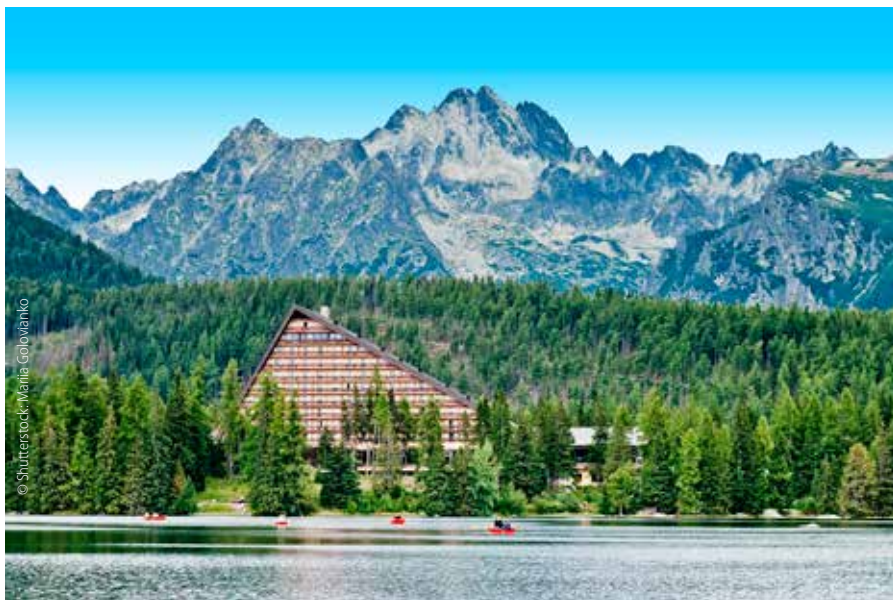
The EESC and its activities in the framework of the Slovak Presidency

As part of the preparations for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU, **an extraordinary Bureau meeting will take place in Bratislava** on 14 June. The members of the Committee will be hosted by the Slovak ESC representatives at a conference centre located in the Slovak capital. The Bureau meeting will be preceded by a debate attended by Miroslav Lajčák, Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, and representatives of local civil society.

The Slovak Presidency **programme will be presented by Ivan Korčok**, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and Government Plenipotentiary for the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union, during the EESC's July plenary session on 13 July. The preliminary objectives of the programme are, among other things, the energy union, the single market, the cohesion policy, the capital markets union and the migration crisis.

During the Slovak Presidency, every EESC Group will hold a meeting in Bratislava. These meetings will take place during the last months of 2016. Other activities to be held under the Slovak Presidency include **two cultural events to be held on EESC premises**: a photo exhibition on 13 July («Reflection from Slovakia» presented by photographer Yaro M. Kupčo - images of Slovak nature) at the beginning of the Presidency, and the closing cultural event on 14 December.

Tatiana Adamišová, Marián Brestovanský, Sonia Calvy (REL)



13 July 2016

Yaro M. Kupčo: Reflections from Slovakia - photo exhibition: Opening event of the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union at the EESC. The exhibition will be in the EESC's premises from 13 July 2016 until 16 September 2016.

13-14 July 2016

Plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee: The programme of the Slovak presidency will be presented by Mr Ivan Korčok, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and Government Plenipotentiary for the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union.

14 December 2016

Slovak cultural evening: Closing event of the Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union at the EESC.

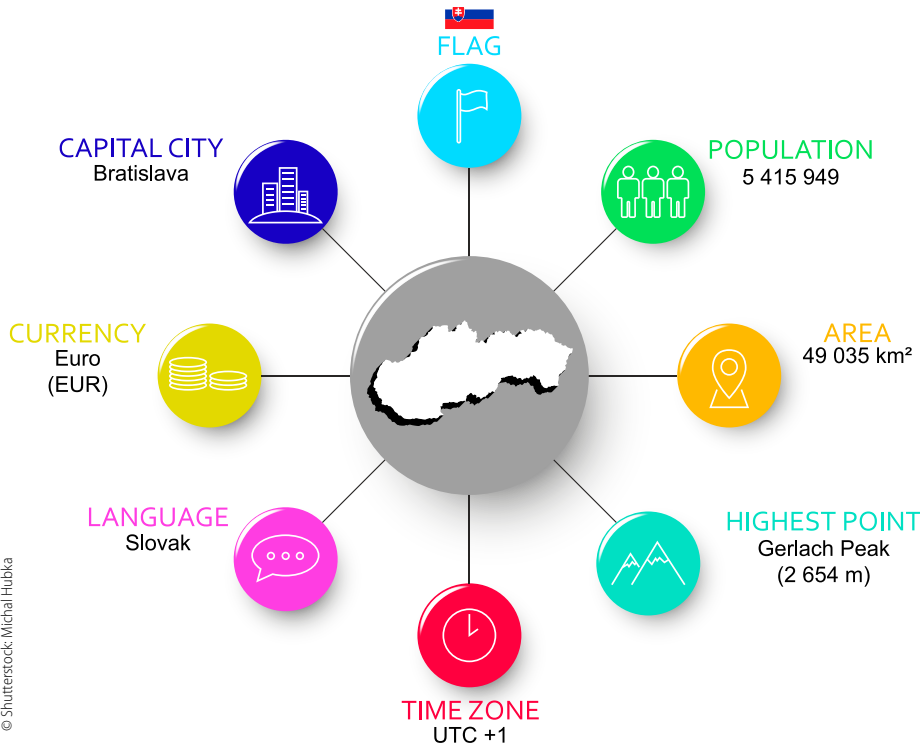
The EESC Inter-institutional relations unit and its activities during the EU presidencies

One of the main roles of the unit for Inter-institutional relations and relations with national ESCs (hereafter REL unit) is to monitor the activities of the other institutions and inform them about EESC activities. The REL unit acts as a point of contact for the other departments and institutions for any kind of information or support regarding inter-institutional relations.

The REL unit, on behalf of the EESC, handles relations with the Council of the EU. It has a long tradition of working together with the EU Presidencies, based on the work programme prepared jointly with the Permanent Representation of the Member State holding the forthcoming EU Presidency.

The EESC cooperates with the Council Presidencies in the following areas:

- Exploratory opinions requested by the ministries of the Member State holding the EU Presidency;
- Statement by a representative of the Member State holding the EU Presidency at EESC plenary sessions, presenting the Presidency's priorities at the beginning, and results at the end, of each six-month Presidency, for debate with EESC members;
- Participation of the EESC (Committee president or president of the relevant Section) at informal meetings of the Council of the EU;
- Participation of representatives of the Presidency in EESC events, or organisation of joint events, often in cooperation with the ESC of the Member State holding the Presidency;
- Seminars/conferences/hearings/extraordinary Group meetings organised in the Member State holding the EU Presidency.



© Shutterstock: Michal Hubka

© Shutterstock: Rainer Lesniewski



Proposals for a reform of the EU's own resources and the role of organised civil society

Slovakia's first presidency of the Council of the European Union in the latter half of 2016 will build on the work of the Dutch presidency and focus on the following key issues: economic growth, the digital single market, building the energy union, migration and EU enlargement¹. The Slovak presidency's programme and priorities will reflect the European agenda, which is to be finalised in the second half of 2016. It should include a proposal for reform of EU own resources – and this is an area where the civil society organisations, represented by the EESC, could have an important role to play.



High level group on EU own resources

In 2014, a high level group was set up under the chairmanship of Mario Monti tasked with preparing a change to EU own resources². Own resources as they stand are unclear and complicated.

Moreover, a growing number of Member States are receiving corrections and rebates – confirmation that wealthier countries are shouldering a disproportionate burden in financing the EU budget. The gross national income component, which makes up the bulk of the EU budget, is not actually an own resource as such, but a contribution from the budgets of the Member States³. Moreover, this share is constantly increasing. This is why it is essential to work together on the following tasks: simplifying the system of contributions and payments for Member States, presenting a new own resources system and reforming the corrections system.

The new own resources system should meet the following criteria: equity and fairness, efficiency, stability, transparency and simplicity, accountability and budgetary discipline, a focus on European added value, subsidiarity and fiscal sovereignty, and limits on political transaction costs.

Proposals for new own resources

Available information suggests that three main options are on the table: VAT, a financial transaction tax and an environmental tax. The EESC has dealt with all of these options in one way or another in its opinions.

My own view is that the EU needs an own resources system that will help to strike the right balance between environmental protection and support for economic growth and jobs – far from an easy task. Evidence of this are the serious problems energy-intensive industries are having in meet employment goals. One option for the new system would be an environmental tax in the form of a carbon levy⁴. This would tax end consumption according to how much energy is consumed and CO₂ emitted in the production process, irrespective of whether all or part

of that process is inside or outside the EU. In line with the principle of fiscal neutrality, all European producers would receive compensation in the form of abolition or reduction of certain charges and taxes, above all labour costs. One potential effect of introducing a new carbon levy is that European businesses would then compete on a more level playing field with non-European competitors. It would also make environmentally unfriendly products relatively more expensive and environmentally friendly ones relatively cheaper⁵.

The Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU and an opportunity for the EESC

The Monti High Level Group is to present its final report during the Slovak Presidency. In it the group will propose a reform of EU own resources and set out the strengths and weaknesses of the various alternatives. There will be an important role or opportunity for the EESC to hold a debate on this at both EU and national levels. A consensual solution will have to be found that all interested parties will embrace – employers, employees and other interest groups, as well as political groups in the European Parliament and all Member States, and this will by certainly not be an easy task.

Viliam Páleník (AFM)

¹ For more details, see: http://www.mzv.sk/web/en/slovak_presidency_in_the_council_of_the_european_union.

² For more details, see: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/library/biblio/documents/multiannual_framework/HLGOR_1stassessment2014final_en.pdf.

³ If done properly, a change to own resources would mean that Article 201 of the Treaty of Rome would actually be implemented for the first time. This is not, in fact, what has been happening so far, since the EU budget is still largely made up of Member State contributions.

⁴ For more details, see: <http://ekonom.sav.sk/sk/publikacie/-p316>.

⁵ For more details, see: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.publications.38639&_cldee=dmlsaWFtQHBhbGVuaWsuc2s%3d&urlid=4.

Energy labelling: the Commission is making more changes

The system for labelling energy products is to change again. Less than five years after the last directive (Directive 2010/30/EU), the European Commission is now putting forward a new legislative proposal acting on the measures set out in the Energy Union Package and remedying the obvious shortcomings in the current legislation.

The most immediate difference in the new proposal, COM(2015) 341 final of 15 July 2015, is that instead of a directive it opts for a regulation, an instrument that will ensure systematic and uniform implementation at European level.

It also does away with the A+ to A+++ categories in the product classification introduced just five years ago, as too many products are now concentrated in some of these categories. Above all, consumers have found the system unclear and it has discouraged them from purchasing products that are more energy efficient.

The proposed regulation will therefore revert to the old "A to G" scale, accompanied by a colour scale from red to green indicating which products consume more or less energy. Products already on the market are to be rescaled over a six-month period.

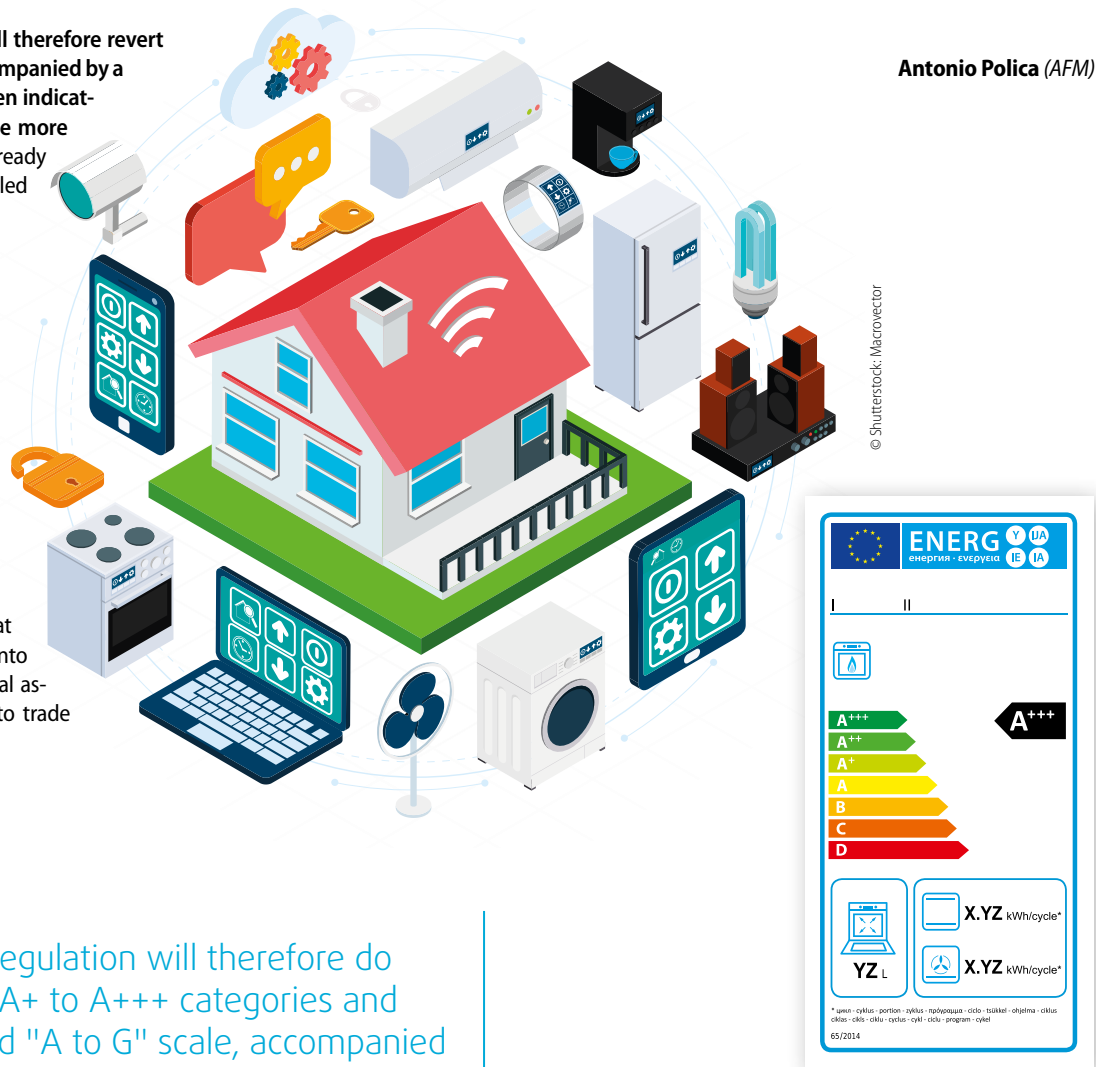
The regulation also sets up a European database to facilitate the task of market surveillance and a European forum in which stakeholders will be involved as a matter of course, including when the Commission is granted the right to adopt delegated acts.

However, it would seem that the proposal fails to take into account a number of key legal aspects and issues pertaining to trade

and technological development, not to mention cross-cutting social problems such as «energy poverty», something that affects one in ten people in Europe. There are, for instance, no ad hoc labelling and monitoring measures for online trade or for reprocessed energy products (as advocated by the circular economy model); there is no common strategy to ensure subsidiarity, which would make the more efficient energy products more readily accessible to society's most vulnerable groups; and lastly, responsibility for the system of sanctions has been entrusted to national governments rather than being regulated at European level, which is at odds with the rationale of the regulation.

Finally, the fact that Commission proposal COM(2015) 341 final is the first to be discussed in the wake of the new Energy Package has merely heightened expectations and tensions between the Council, Commission and Parliament on a subject which was originally considered to be a purely technical one.

Antonio Polica (AFM)



The proposed regulation will therefore do away with the A+ to A+++ categories and revert to the old "A to G" scale, accompanied by a colour scale from red to green.

FROM AGRICULTURAL TO FOOD POLICY – TOWARDS HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

21 April 2016, The Hague

From field to fork – working together for good food

Farmers, consumers, academics and policy-makers were among the wide range of participants at a Group III "Various Interests" European Economic and Social Committee event in The Hague (NL) to examine the future of food production and consumption.

Sustainable food policy involves many elements: safeguarding the livelihoods of farmers and workers in the industry; promoting healthy eating – especially among children; protecting the environment and at the same time guaranteeing a supply of good-quality affordable food products.

The EESC's "Various Interests" group wanted to bring together as many different stakeholders as possible, to draw up recommendations for the Presidency of the EU Council.

In his introduction, Group President Luca Jahier highlighted the lack of a comprehensive EU approach to food sustainability. "Globally, some 800 million people suffer chronic hunger; more than two billion people are malnourished, he noted. "However, shockingly each year, 1.3 billion tonnes of food produced for human consumption is wasted or lost in the food supply chain. Change is needed, change is wanted and change is possible", he insisted.

The event was partly inspired by a recent study by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy, entitled "Towards a food policy", which called for investment in a resilient food system.

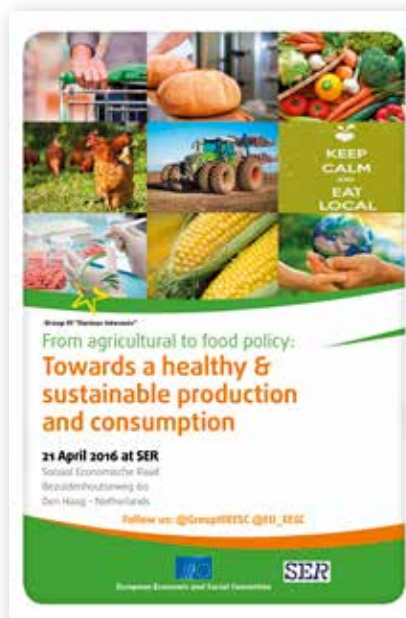
The co-author of this study, Josta de Hoog, stressed at the conference that production and consumption are interdependent, and called for agricultural production, ecological sustainability and health to be anchored in one overarching food policy. Aldrik Gierveld, who represented the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, stressed the government's commitment to putting this topic on the European agenda during the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU. The third keynote speaker,

former Commissioner Franz Fischler, focused on the value of interdisciplinary innovative research in bringing about a transformation of the food system.

During the remainder of the conference, panellists discussed with approximately 100 participants what a comprehensive food policy should consist of, and how it could be implemented by authorities, in cooperation with all the actors in the food chain. The panels were moderated by representatives of three major European organisations involved in the process, namely COPA-COGECA, BEUC and EEB and included speakers approaching the issue from widely different perspectives. For instance, environmentalists and nutritionists focused on the need to induce people to eat less meat and dairy products. Farmers and experts in land use planning argued that we should make existing production more efficient, while ensuring the use of sustainable methods within the EU and in trade with developing countries.

At the end of the conference, Luca Jahier concluded that the need for a comprehensive food policy was widely felt, notwithstanding the differences in approaches proposed by the participants. The Group III president argued that policymakers should swiftly start working on this paradigm shift in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders.

The wide-ranging recommendations from the event call for more sustainable agricultural production to slow climate change and protect natural resources, and cover public health, education and awareness raising, research and innovation, supply chains and food safety.





© Shutterstock

“Healthy and sustainable food production and consumption should be an easy and affordable choice both for producers and consumers”, meeting delegates concluded.

Setting up an International Panel on Food and Nutrition Security would be a clear first step towards stronger cooperation and an interdisciplinary approach to policy-making. The European Commission could also adopt a more coherent strategy by establishing an inter-service task force to develop an EU food policy.

The recommendations include existing examples of good practice. For example, the Dutch city of Ede developed a programme of inspiring, food-related events and projects focused on everything from science

to entertainment, with partners including the local hospital, businesses and schools. Also in the Netherlands, the “flexitarian” eating campaign encourages people to vary their diets and consume less meat.

As well as going to all EU institutions, the recommendations were designed to feed into an informal meeting of EU agriculture ministers called for by the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU in May 2016, which should launch a debate on the future of food and the Common Agricultural Policy after 2020. The Presidency has already asked the EESC to draw up an exploratory opinion on More Sustainable Food Systems, with Group III member Mindaugas Maciulevičius as the rapporteur. Group III hopes that the EESC will continue to promote the development of a comprehensive food policy in the coming years.

Secretariat of Group III

Change is needed,
change is wanted and
change is possible.

Time will change: Living colours and Biobased collection



The first exhibition linked to the EU Netherlands Presidency was open to the public from 16 March to 15 April.

The EESC was honoured to host the exhibition, because the creativity of young people and initiatives for a sustainable future are both important for Europe.

Aspiring young students from AKV St Joost School of Fine Art and Design and the Centre of Expertise Biobased Economy (CoE-BBE) contributed jointly to this exhibition, introducing their innovative ideas on the use of biobased materials and design that reflects the passage of time.



Levende kleuren (Living colours) reveals the possibilities of sustainable interior design by applying creativity to the natural chemistry of fabric dye. Artists have cleverly used the technical and chemical qualities of plant-based natural colours to create carpets and curtains which slowly lose their colour to reveal emerging patterns. Using natural dyes and fabric colours that fade and change with wear on household objects contributes to dynamic interiors that really do change with time.

Biobased collection is an example of how biobased materials can be presented in a way which is easier to understand to make them more attractive to users. Objects for daily use such as disposable coffee cups and egg cartons, produced from unusual but sustainable materials, show that a more environment-friendly future is possible.

Merve Güngör (VIP)

Your Europe Your Say (YEYS) school debate, 2016



Your Europe Your Say is a youth event that the EESC has organised since 2010, and the aim is to bring students from all over Europe together so that they can work on topics that affect European young people and propose their solutions. During the two-day event, **the young people have the chance to meet their peers from various European countries, hold debates in a multinational environment and get first-hand experience of what it is like to take part in plenary sessions.**

Each year, secondary schools from all over Europe register to be selected in a random draw. Three students and one teacher from the selected schools are invited to Brussels to attend the workshops and come up with proposals. This year, schools from five EU applicant countries (Albania, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Turkey) were included in the selection for the first time. 33 schools were chosen from over 400 applications, and 99 students participated in YEYS to voice their opinions about this year's topic: Integration of migrants and refugees in our societies.

After playing some ice-breaking games, talking about their roots in different parts of Europe and getting to know each other on the first day, the students divided into groups based on the aspect of the topic they were interested in, and started a series of workshops and proposal sessions.

EESC Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier introduced the "R U Ready" game during the second day of YEYS, which is an educational tool to learn about the EU and the role of the EESC. Part of the game involves campaigning for your policies and influencing other colleagues. It can be found at <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.r-eu-ready>.



In the last plenary session, the students explained their proposals, asked questions for clarification, challenged different groups in order to decide on the best three of ten proposals and voted. The democratic process they took part in was a beautiful manifestation of European diversity, democracy and respect, and the students' commitment was inspiring.

Prior to their arrival in Brussels, students were visited by an EESC member at their schools to prepare them for the plenary. Members also introduced the EESC, its activities and its place in the EU system during their visits. Teachers expressed their thanks for the productive and stimulating debates the visits of the Members initiated.



The three proposals made by student delegations that received the highest number of votes this year were:

- 1. Media and migrants, media reform using investment from the EU:** ideas to impose stricter guidelines for reporting on migrant issues and other measures to raise awareness and reduce discrimination;
- 2. Revision of the Dublin agreement:** hotspots, faster processing of asylum applications, and language and cultural training before distributing refugees across the EU;
- 3. Education plan - no grading at first, exchange of cultures, adjusting at own pace:** easing refugees into the education system, recognising the importance of education for integration.

The proposals were presented at the European Migration Forum to the Permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration (IMI) in April 2016. More information about Your Europe Your Say is available at <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-your-europe-your-say-2016> and the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/youreuropeyoursay/>.

Merve Güngör (VIP)

Welcoming work on the European Pillar of Social Rights

EC President Juncker announced in his State of the Union on the 9th of September 2015: "I will want to develop a European Pillar of Social Rights, which takes account of the changing realities of the world of work and which can serve as a compass for the renewed convergence within the euro area." This European Pillar of Social Rights is of primary interest to the Workers Group.

Group II welcomes the launching of a public consultation on the Social Pillar. The stated goals of this consultation include an assessment of current EU social "acquis" (the social rules currently in place in the EU legal order), reflection on new trends in work patterns and societies, and a general discussion on the European Pillar of Social Rights itself. This discussion should encompass aspects such as the Pillar's scope, content, role as a part of the EMU, specific principles proposed, and potential challenges.

The European Economic and Social Committee has also been called upon directly and will answer by putting together a study group to respond to the Commission's work. Group II will be actively participating in the study group. In fact, Gabriele Bischoff, Group II President, will be acting as co-Rapporteur along with the presidents from Groups I and III.

As is clear by the involvement of all three group presidents, this opinion will go beyond the normal study group process. It is agreed that the Social Pillar is both incredibly important as well as beyond the scope of only one section. Therefore, the intention is to incorporate the perspectives and voices of a diverse range of actors across the EU member states. Gabriele Bischoff announced at the group meeting on April 27th that 28 national debates will be started and guided by EESC members. The feedback from these debates will then be used in the drafting of the opinion.

In the priorities for 2016-2017, the Workers' Group included a strong social dimension and good regulation for social progress. Additionally, they have prioritized an EMU that works for the people. It is then no surprise that the members of the Workers' Group are so eager to see progress made in the European Pillar of Social Rights. Especially, in light of the Pillar's hopes of complementing efforts to deepen the EMU while also modernising, broadening, and deepening social rights.

The currently anticipated timeline will see the opinion on this topic go to the section meeting on 27.09.2016 and the plenary on 19-20.10.2016.

Gabrielle Bergen (Group II)

Reviving Investment in the EU Commissioner Hill debates remedies with the EESC

On 14 April 2016, the EESC's ECO section held a meeting, at which Commissioner Jonathan Hill, responsible for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, gave an overview of ongoing and upcoming initiatives in the fields of Capital Markets Union (CMU) and Banking



Union. Mr Hill pointed out that one of the Commission's top priorities was to revive investment. To achieve that goal, deeper capital markets and a stronger banking union are required. He also stressed the need for alternative sources of financing since, for example, European Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) were four times more reliant on banks than their American counterparts. As one remedy to this, the proposed revision of the Prospectus Directive will make it easier to raise capital on the capital markets.

In the ensuing general debate with the Commissioner, EESC members raised questions on the role of monetary policy, the time frame for achieving the desired results of CMU and different perspectives for big and small enterprises with respect to accessing sources of financing. Other topics put forward included the dramatic fall in demand, insufficient investor confidence, negative effects of austerity and the overall weak architecture of Economic and Monetary Union. Furthermore, Mr Hill was asked to give his assessment on the upcoming referendum on EU membership of the United Kingdom.

In his reply the Commissioner stressed that the biggest challenge facing the EU was the lack of growth and that regulation should be focused on stimulating it. He also highlighted that there is a great need to create an environment that builds confidence so that investment starts flowing again. For this reason regulation of financial markets is vital as it sets a solid framework for assuring transparency and consumer protection.

As for the pressing problem of access to financing for SMEs, he said that different initiatives targeting angel investment, venture capital, crowd funding and listing of SMEs should improve the difficult situation. Finally, the Commissioner reiterated that we should learn from good practices and he called for structural reforms to take place in the Member States to help exit the crisis.

Concerning the UK referendum on its EU membership, the Commissioner explained that the consequences of a negative vote would be enormous for the UK financial services industry, as the EU is its biggest export market. He specified that London was judged to have the most competitive financial services sector in the world, which implies that EU regulation could not be too stringent or damaging for the UK. Concluding, he said that the process of leaving the EU would be long, difficult and uncertain for the UK, the latter being a major deterrent for investments.

Sylwia Zdziech (ECO)

The European Citizens' Initiative Day

Spotlight on civil society – your wish is our command! The CSS unit has recently been engaged in two important projects: the European Citizens' Initiative Day and the Civil Society Days.

Only the first event has already taken place, while for the second the preparations are well underway.

While it is difficult to tell how the Civil Society Days will go (this year's programme spans two days and focuses on migrants), we can discuss and reflect on the ECI Day to our heart's content. The tone became heated on several occasions, in particular when it came to the Commission's decision not to amend Regulation 211/2011, the regulation implementing the ECI (European Citizens' Initiative) pursuant to Article 11 of the TEU and Article 24 of the TFEU. An immediate source of tension between participants and institutions was the absence of European Commission Vice-President, Frans Timmermans, which caused some disappointment and frustration among participants, who were already accusing the institutions of lack of political support. Although some last-minute rumours suggested that there might be some sign of revising the regulation by the end of 2017, for the time being they remain hearsay yet to be confirmed. Citizens and ECI organisers are calling for streamlining of the procedures necessary for the organisation and preparation of an ECI, which are still hostage to rules which do not take into account the practical implications of an ECI. Thus, the red card was held up on what was a day of conferences, workshops and even a vote in which the participants were able to express their support for or disappointment with the initiative. **What do the members of organised civil society want? A better, more open, transparent Europe, in which the centres of power are also working in the same direction and are willing to open their doors to participation by the people.** The impression received by some ECI organisers is that the Commission does not really seem interested in a change, sometimes even fearing bad management of the instrument itself. It is therefore clear that consensus has yet to be achieved on the matter, but the European Economic and Social Committee has a duty to support the citizens as they fight this battle.



The Civil Society Days are a different matter, or at least that is the intention, as they are a well-established event which brings together the various Committee sections and the members of the Liaison Group, which represent European organised civil society. The participants will discuss migration and how Europe can be structured in the long term without losing its characteristic openness and, at the same time, preserving its own security. As usual, the weapons wielded by the participants will be words, as they fight it out during the various panel discussions organised by both Committee sections (REX, SOC) and external organisations (ECAS, CEV (European Volunteer Service), EYF, AEDH and Solidar). The key figures in the sector will also be different, including Conny Reuter, President of the Liaison Group and Solidar, and Cecile Kyenge, European Parliament rapporteur for the migrant situation.

Other MEPs will be present at the various workshops. **The event will be based on three strands: the relationship between security and freedom, the various procedures for inclusion and integration, and possible responses to the crisis.** Given the topical nature of the subject and the uncertainty as how things will develop, this year's event is particularly relevant and we hope to see large numbers of participants.

It is still difficult to talk about European citizenship, as too few people are familiar with how the institutions work and the procedures for getting involved. Our task is to disseminate this knowledge with information and awareness-raising campaigns in the Member States, but, at the same time, we cannot hold back from fighting within the institutions to guarantee citizens fair consideration and treatment by those in power. We still have a long way to go, but with instruments such as the European Citizens' Initiative the democratic deficit may be significantly reduced. This is what our founding fathers believed, and we must keep faith.

Silvia Giacon (CSS)

A CLOSE LOOK AT THE AFM – AT THE VERY HEART OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

At the EESC, like everyone else, we have been doing a great deal of soul-searching on the recent attacks, the future of Europe and immigration. We also have causes for celebration, such as the AFM general assembly, which enjoyed a strong turnout this year. The former members' association aims to raise awareness, promote the Committee and its institutional activities and to strengthen links between the two bodies. The tone has now been set.

Following the Bureau meeting, the general assembly began in the Civitas room at 11 a.m. on 11 April 2016 with the Bureau members facing the podium. It would have been business as usual, had it not been for the many new faces of the latest members to join our ranks. The first participants arrived at the EESC shortly before 9 a.m. and over the next couple of hours, the numbers swelled to almost 80. This was no mean feat, considering the transport complications that Brussels was sadly experiencing.

In his usual caring manner, Roger Briesch, former EESC president and current president of the AFM, welcomed the new members, and, once the agenda had been adopted, took the opportunity to hold a minute's silence in tribute to members who had recently passed away.

NO POINT TAKING COAL TO NEWCASTLE

The meeting started with the «chores»: taking stock of the 2015 activities, the budget proposals for 2016, unveiling new projects and the increase in membership fees. Then it was question time, which raised the temperature of the meeting and sparked the curiosity of new members.

The renewal of the current Bureau then came up, and it was decided to extend its mandate for a further year. The discussion immediately turned to the future membership of the Bureau.



Opinions were divided between the current system and the former system, which limited membership on the basis of nationality. These heated exchanges led spontaneously to the formation of two camps when addressing the issue of women members in the Bureau. Hic labor est!



Thanks to their firm presence, the Bureau and the Registry took control of the situation. It was decided that a future study coordinated by the incumbent Bureau should be carried out. The items on the agenda were then voted on by the assembly.

All that remained was the final agenda item: the icing on the cake. There was a surprise in store when the president turned to the planned trip to Oxford: the British sense of humour brought the house down with a quip about Brexit and the risk that the 23 June referendum could scupper the expedition. All nationalities burst out laughing, before listening to the British organisers carefully list the details of the visit, which focused on education.

A BRIGHT CHORUS

The former members took the opportunity to extend their warm thanks to Nicolas Alexopoulos and Georges Dassis, who had been kind enough to invite them for lunch. Various conversations were struck up as common ground was discovered with the newest members.



THE THREE GROUPS IN ACTION

The participants then returned to work. Mr Dassis, who was otherwise engaged abroad, was represented by Nicolas Alexopoulos. Mr Alexopoulos welcomed those present and highlighted the Committee's firm commitment to including the expertise of former Members in its current work in order to address the challenges currently facing the European Union. Luis Planas, secretary general of the EESC, was next to take the floor, stressing the importance of the AFM for the Committee and offering his full support and that of the Secretariat as a whole.



The remainder of the programme featured statements by José Antonio Moreno Díaz, Antonello Pezzini and Luca Jahier. Nothing slipped their notice. The main topics of the day were addressed: migration, climate change, the importance of information technology and social rights. The question of a potential Brexit was raised, provoking a lively debate. Naturally it was up to British citizens to decide for themselves.

However, all members – both current and former – stressed the need to provide the British public with all relevant information so that they were fully aware of the facts when they came to make their choice. It was impossible to give the floor to all the former members present. There was a great deal of interest, clarity of vision and absolutely no doubt about the excellent quality of the former members' ideas, something the Committee could draw on in the future.



CURTAIN

Four hours of intense discussions were followed by a break, with enticing aromas already wafting from the direction of the restaurant. Dishes devised by La Maison du Cygne made for a very friendly atmosphere at the traditional dinner and an enjoyable evening was had by all at the corner of number 26, Grand-Place, near to the statue of 't Serclaes... It goes without saying that making a little wish is part and parcel of the tradition, so... Brussels, you'll be seeing us again next year.

Maria Cossu (*Grefse*). **Natália Schneiderová** contributed to this article.



BOOSTING GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT THROUGH IMPROVING ICT

One of the long-term priorities of the EU is to extend the use of the internet, both in everyday life and in business. At the end of the Italian Presidency experts discussed the prospects for the development of the internet and the support needed to achieve that aim at a conference on *Boosting growth and employment through improving ICT infrastructures and broadband* held by the EESC in Palermo. The conference was presumably held in Sicily because, as many speakers stressed, the internet plays an important part in facilitating contacts between islands and their mainland. The lack of an internet connection at the conference venue underlined the need to improve internet accessibility.

The internet is important both in everyday life, because it prevents people from being isolated and makes goods and services more easily accessible, and in business, as it helps to reduce communication costs and to broaden the access of customers and partners. Unfortunately, in many areas there is still no internet access for technical reasons outside the large towns and cities. And in many places where the internet is accessible it is too expensive; in some countries monthly internet usage costs amount to more than 5% of the average net income.

For the period 2014-2020 the European Structural and Investment Funds focus investment on four key priorities, including ICT (thematic objective No. 2). All countries should use this opportunity to place more emphasis on the implementation of the objectives of the Digital Agenda. One possibility is to develop high-speed broadband networks, which for various regions such as Campania and Calabria in Italy have already made a significant difference. The Structural Fund contribution covers part of project risk under the Connected Communities initiative, and provides

technical support to local communities struggling to attract investment. The implementation of the Digital Agenda in the EU should create about 100 000 new ICT jobs in the EU each year, foster the development of tourism and develop cross-border trade. Websites and online booking portals make even small guest houses accessible to millions of potential visitors. And small producers, such as a sorbet manufacturer in Naples, will be able to reach potential customers throughout the world, as far away as Japan. It will also help people in the social field; people living in remote areas will, for example, have instant access to medical advice. And distance learning opportunities have of course existed for some time.

Our task is above all to promote digitalisation in rural areas, in both technical and financial terms, by promoting awareness of the possibilities in society, helping to develop the accessibility of internet services, and using the European funds effectively to ensure internet access. It is to be hoped that the responsible members of the European Commission - Andrus Ansip, Vice-President for the Digital Single Market, and Jyrki Katainen, Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness - will be able to steer digital development in accordance with the interests of users without bowing to pressure from the communication industry to modernise digitalisation in a way that restricts competition and makes services more expensive.

Our task is above all to promote digitalisation in rural areas, in both technical and financial terms, by promoting awareness of the possibilities in society, helping to develop the accessibility of internet services, and using the European funds effectively to ensure internet access. It is to be hoped that the responsible members of the European Commission - Andrus Ansip, Vice-President for the Digital Single Market, and Jyrki Katainen, Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness - will be able to steer digital development in accordance with the interests of users without bowing to pressure from the communication industry to modernise digitalisation in a way that restricts competition and makes services more expensive.

Henriks Danusēvičs (AFM)



One of the long-term priorities of the EU is to extend the use of the internet.

Discover south-west France



When my term of office ended in September 2015, I asked myself the same question that many former members have had to ask themselves: Is there life after the Committee? I had dedicated nine years to Europe and met members, whose experience and character I had come to know through study groups and discussions about subjects which I had not even heard of until then... An experience like that leaves its mark and you honestly ask yourself what comes next.

The Committee is a remarkable institution. Its members represent a broad range of experience and cultures and often have very strong personalities. It is no accident that their organisations have chosen them to be their representatives at European level. It is because they are well known for their frank speech, analyses, convictions and ability to defend their ideas and accept new ones. In addition, life at the Committee changes you, it fosters a broad outlook on the world and the spirit of tolerance and ability to listen that are essential to forging compromise.

Where do you go from there? Naturally, you go on serving your organisation, using the experience you have gained to defend the European ideal and 'going local' through outreach to schools, associations and universities.

Well, I am doing all these things, but I have decided to do more. I would like to host Europeans in order to enable them to discover the part of France where I live and which I love. It owes its unique cultural heritage to the Hundred Years War (1337 to 1453) between the kings and dukes of France and England, which has left many traces, and to the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

My home is on the Camino de Santiago, which witnessed streams of pilgrims throughout the Middle Ages, now replaced by a trail of walkers and ramblers who go past each morning from April to November. Nowadays, walkers do not just come from Europe; there are Canadians, Australians, Americans...

This house is now on Airbnb and I invite all former members to visit me there. They will be given a warm welcome and a guided tour of the architectural, historical and gastronomic gems of this region, which is situated on the Garonne, between Toulouse and Bordeaux, and which Stendhal described as the Tuscany of France.

Sign up now; I look forward to seeing you. Search for Moissac (France) on Airbnb, and then look for the photo of my house...

Beatrice Quin (AFM)



www.airbnb.fr/rooms/11846418

SIMULATION TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF THE EESC

A role play for schools and universities designed to raise the profile of the Committee and its activities

Making young people more aware of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), its activities and its role in the dynamics of the EU, while promoting its principles and values. These objectives, and the support of the Workers' Group, has given rise to the idea of putting on a more structured footing the many individual «Going Local» activities carried out by EESC members during the 2010-2015 term of office in schools and universities, by creating a «role play» designed to simulate the internal processes of the EESC with the ultimate aim of drafting an opinion.

In fact, the EESC already organises a number of important events involving young people, including «Your Europe, Your Say!» and «Back to School». This initiative, however, is not intended to replace these, but rather complement them. The goal of the initiative is to maximise involvement by engaging young people in the process of drafting an opinion, but without any selection process, thereby increasing the number of beneficiaries. In addition, the fact that it is a Going Local initiative brings considerable organisational and cost advantages. The model can be replicated in all schools and universities across the EU; it has a standard format that can be tailored to specific needs.

Replicating the process of drawing up an opinion is no easy feat, given that the range of interests and the physical and linguistic obstacles and timeframes involved are difficult to recreate. It is, however, possible to imagine that in a role play scenario a simplified simulation could be created with a view to highlighting the main sources of conflict, thereby «forcing» the participants to find suitable win-win solutions.

Every student will be randomly assigned a different identity based on country of origin and the association they represent, bringing with it a specific set of objectives that will often conflict with those of other participants. In addition, each student will have to adopt the working methods typically used by the EESC, which aim to achieve a "dynamic compromise".



THE SIMULATION CAN BE SUMMARISED IN THE FOLLOWING TEN KEY STEPS:

Minimum number of participants: 20 to 30. In order to replicate the typical clashes of interest in the EESC, the simulation must involve enough participants to bring to life the key phases involved in discussing the opinion, recreating the differences stemming from the participants' countries of origin and the associations they represent.

Carrying out the simulation in two phases. The ideal scenario is to organise two meetings of two to three hours each, held on different days. This should facilitate better understanding of the role play and of the EESC, and lead to a more refined opinion. In the first meeting, the participants will learn about the EESC and the rules and objectives of the role play. In the second meeting, they will discuss the opinion in their interest group and adopt it in a plenary session. Between the two meetings, the rapporteur and the members of the study group are expected to meet and draft a document with the support of a facilitator. In order to maximise involvement and increase efficiency, a "countdown" system should be used to distinguish between the various phases and individual steps.

Choosing the right subject. The role play consists of drafting an opinion on a communication from the European Commission. The success of the initiative will depend on the participants' level of involvement. They should, therefore, choose well-known topics that are of direct interest to young people.

Circulate the documents in advance. The following three documents should be handed out in advance for the students to study in their own time or with the support of a teacher: a) the PowerPoint presentation of the EESC; b) the European Commission document to be analysed; and c) the latest EESC opinion on a similar topic.

Focusing more on the role play and less on the EESC. The aim of the role play is to raise the profile of the EESC in an alternative way, which is different from traditional teaching methods. The EESC will, therefore, be introduced briefly in the first meeting, but greater focus will be placed on the rules, goals and stages of the role play.

Assuming a role and an identity. This is the most difficult stage. Some students may struggle to assume an identity different from their own. Spending time on this stage of the simulation and referring to specific examples will never be a waste of time. If there is little time available, participants should consider using a simplified model. In these cases, every student will express his/herself with the aim of finding agreement with the other participants. The three interest groups can be replaced by three different classes (of more or less the same age).

Carefully allocating the key roles. A rapporteur and two co-rapporteurs must be chosen from the more active students, with the support of a teacher and ensuring that both sexes are represented. Each of the three participants will belong to a different interest group. They will play a decisive role because they will have to draft an opinion that draws together the different needs of the participants; address the interests of the group



and the agreements made with the rapporteur/co-rapporteurs; and present the contents of the opinion and the compromises reached to the rest of the group. All other roles should be allocated randomly based on the processes outlined above.

The EESC member and the teacher play a key role. In order to ensure efficiency and quality, it is crucial that the EESC member be proactive and involved from the start. The same applies to the teachers, who are tasked with involving and preparing the students. The students can often lose their way in the debates or feel as if they have few ideas. In both cases, they should be encouraged to reason and find agreement. The presence of the member and teachers, acting in their roles as facilitators, is essential in every phase. In particular, the EESC member should chair the plenary session in order to guarantee an accurate simulation of the meeting.

Supporting the students without influencing their decisions. The students will deal with a series of conflicts and a model of conflict resolution known as a “dynamic compromise”. Helping them draw up the opinion should not amount to influencing them directly in their decisions. At the end of the role play, they must feel like they have adopted an opinion based exclusively on their own efforts.

Awareness of the result achieved. At the end of the simulation, all participants should be sent the opinion they adopted as well as the equivalent opinion adopted by the EESC, enabling them to compare and better understand their work.

This model, which was first tested in February 2012 at Vittorio Emanuele II boarding school in Rome and endorsed in its final format by geopolitics students at Roma Tre University in May 2015, has produced fascinating results from the very beginning. The depth of analysis and number of suggestions confirm that, if adequately prepared and motivated, the students can achieve excellent results. In addition, besides improving the students’ knowledge of the EESC, this simulation is an excellent experience that can be replicated in the contexts of other institutions and associations. It is also a useful tool for the member running the initiative to keep in contact and create a dialogue with a section of society that is often difficult to reach and neglected, enabling him/her to better fulfil the task of bridging the gap between the institutions and the citizens recognised by the Treaties.

Antonio Polica (AFM)

Lost generation



Recently, the president of the ECB, speaking in Lisbon, said that “today’s young are paying a high price for the crisis”. According to Draghi, there is a danger, especially in the southern EU countries, of creating a “lost generation” of unemployed, with rates as high as 40% depending on the Member State. These figures are in some cases twice the European average.

Youth unemployment is now the main issue for our society. In many regions of the EU it represents nothing less than a tragedy made up of frustration, anxiety and insecurity: it holds young people back at precisely the time when their greater physical strength and intellectual capacity mean that they have more to give.

Creating jobs for young people and increasing the overall employment rate are the objectives that must be achieved by national and EU economic policies, rather than focusing on early retirement or other measures for unsustainably lowering the exit age. “Good” jobs are not created with these kinds of measures, which would weigh heavily on the social budget and soon lead to new taxes, thus dampening domestic demand.

The core elements of an employment policy are growth and more dynamic monetary policy. The ECB’s 2015 report highlights some modest results of this nature, but still shows prevailing uncertainty for 2016. Indeed, adverse global economic developments have not helped the European recovery advance sufficiently. The action taken by the Central Bank has resulted in an average decrease of approximately 3% in the effective exchange rate of the euro against 38 currencies, government bond yields dropping to their lowest levels and rising share prices, but in an environment of high volatility. All this has helped bring about a slight fall in unemployment, an upward trend in consumer confidence and an increase in profits, but levels of pay have remained more or less stable. The few positive signs seen last year in the performance of the European economy were not enough to make a significant impact on the high youth unemployment rate in many regions of the EU. The uncertainties, which have marked the beginning of 2016, are not encouraging. We need targeted measures to reduce the tax burden and to increase productivity, in order to make our system more competitive. The EESC opinion on the Annual Growth Survey published in February 2016 recommended, among other things, modernising the European economy and revising tax policy.

If it is to develop and safeguard the single currency, the European Union must be able to implement a set of economic, institutional and political reforms, to which reference has already been made in the Five Presidents’ Report: all that is needed now is the political will of the Member States.

Giovanni Mantovani (AFM)

Europe floundering in the face of multiple crises: Who's to blame?



Europe is currently struggling to overcome an impressive onslaught of diverse crises, the consequences of which are becoming impossible to evaluate:

- an unprecedented security crisis, reawakening our worst memories through the Brussels terrorist attacks, only four months after the Paris attacks;
- an exceptional migration crisis, with massive and uncontrolled numbers of refugees pouring out of a ravaged and war-torn Middle East;
- an acute crisis of solidarity, with reinstated border controls between Member States sweeping aside old Schengen freedoms;
- an interminable economic and social crisis, with high unemployment in most countries, mainly impacting on young people, despite the unprecedented rebalancing of international trade conditions and a “Juncker Plan” which has gone completely unnoticed by everyone;
- a financial crisis held in check, but threatening to resurface due to colossal public debts, structural stock market volatility and a banking sector which – despite a recent EU plan – still lacks transparency and is being propped up by the European Central Bank, the only federal entity in a criminally incomplete economic and monetary union;
- a growing budgetary crisis for the EU, deprived of autonomy and reduced to a meagre role by its national contributors and therefore unable to carry out effectively the common missions it is expected to implement, and forced to sacrifice flagship programmes such as Erasmus student exchanges;
- a recurrent agricultural crisis, particularly in France, which is facing rural unrest in impoverished countryside communities with ageing and dwindling populations;
- a crisis in “sensitive” suburban and urban areas, where strong demographic growth and acute unemployment go hand in hand with inadequate crime control and the recent emergence of radical and terrorist networks;
- a growing regional crisis, with the spread of corrosive political and identity tensions in Scotland, Catalonia and Corsica, the oldest “nation states”;
- a shared identity crisis which has started to take its toll, with the UK unequivocally and resolutely threatening to leave the Union, a referendum planned with support, despite all the benefits acquired, not to mention the exceptional derogations, from its accession forty-three years ago;
- a cohesion crisis that has become structural as a consequence of diversity and numbers since institutional reform has not gone far enough to cope with multiple enlargements, leading to a clash of mentalities and approaches in situations where a single community spirit should have prevailed in the end;
- a decision-making crisis to match the situation, with leaders fixated on their national interests and impervious to any priority that might be in the Union’s general interest — even though the European Council, which brings them together, has become the supreme arbiter;
- a crisis of confidence stemming from all these factors, with opinion-makers and people who have ceased to understand – should this be held against them? – “Europe”, or should we say “non-Europe”, has become as ineffectual as it is incomprehensible and, let’s be honest, unsalable.

Europe's champions and diehards, fifteen years after the introduction of the single currency and ten years after the heyday of large-scale enlargements, are beset by repeated setbacks, rebuffs and knock-backs...

After such wide-ranging disappointments and let-downs, not to say betrayals, it is difficult not to be surprised that despite all these headwinds, European integration still has staunch supporters.

Should they be likened to Sisyphus, condemned by the gods to spend a hopeless eternity rolling a boulder up a hill only to watch it roll back down again, or to Penelope, rightly faithful to the absent wanderer despite pressure and mockery from all who had – with considerable temerity – pronounced him dead?

The true story of European integration reminds us that its supporters have – from the outset – faced their fair share of tribulations, even if official memory only records the triumphs, treaties and smiling faces in ever-expanding family photos. For there has been no shortage of missed opportunities, serious setbacks and unequivocal failures, not to mention a few success stories that have not withstood the test of time. Let us judge them with a little hindsight.

European integration began in 1950, based on an unprecedented pooling of coal and steel production, with its strong links to the preceding conflicts. It was followed in 1957 by joint supervision of atomic energy. But what remains of this today?

The ECSC High Authority, legally disbanded, was absorbed into a European Commission with diminishing federalist tendencies, while Euratom remained somewhere in limbo. Today, energy policies are once again predominantly national and are even a source of friction between Germany and France! Could anyone but a total dreamer or a comedian persist in arguing, as some still do, that Europe's recovery lies in a common approach to energy and the environment?

Similarly, in 1952 nobody thought twice about signing a Treaty establishing a European Defence Community. France's failure to ratify it in 1954 sounded its death knell! Sixty years later, this knell still resonates for Europeans who are still subject to the whims of US protection.

Although there are many, especially to the east, who have clearly reaped proven benefits from this protection, its perpetuation comes at a political cost fraught with implications for the whole of Europe, which, even among firm allies, seems unreasonable! But there again, although some argue for a European recovery based on defence, how do you go about re-using European eggs which have already been broken to make a transatlantic omelette that has already been fried and reheated?

Finally, what is there to say about dreams of a European "political power", supported by citizens directly linked to it and run by real "European" leaders, who are credible and identified as such? The defeat by referendum in 2005 of the constitutional treaty, a first hesitant step along this path, but also the first victim of this sustained crisis of confidence, has proved a long-lasting deterrent against any return to this approach.



What political party leaders – except a few Greens – would currently dare to go on advocating a federal Europe?

And yet, in spite of everything and against all odds, Europe is there, and we come across it every day, albeit when we open our wallets and purses and see its currency, which circulates freely (and no doubt miraculously after such a turbulent history) among so many European countries!

Likewise, Europe, although incomplete, is already more than just a common market. Other seeds have been sown, including the beginnings of a "common foreign and security policy" even if we can all see the difficulties it faces in asserting itself against the Member States that are least inclined to allow it to take the lead!

Launching into fresh political, ideological and philosophical debates will do nothing to get Europe out of these spirals of crisis and failure! We would do better to go back to the "Community method", introduced by Robert Schuman and inspired by Jean Monnet, which has been and very much remains the source of all our joint achievements: Europe can only be built – or maintained – by forging new and real bonds of solidarity!

Today, these new bonds of solidarity are the ones dictated by exceptional shared challenges that can only be confronted, tackled and overcome through a shared approach! This is why our countries can procrastinate no further! On the contrary, there is an urgent need to set up a "European budgetary institute" so that together we can undertake a calm and rational analysis of what action we now need to take together to tackle this unparalleled and uninterrupted succession of interconnected and inextricable, menacing and global crises.

Then let us abandon this futile "lose-lose" game, which consists in playing your cards close to your chest and haggling over every penny! Let us decide what to do together rather than separately, in order to be more effective at a lower cost, in the clear interest of all EU citizens and taxpayers, as well as all Member States!

There will definitely be no shortage of areas where this common sense approach can be applied: a European intelligence agency, federal police, coastguard, civil protection, joint intervention force, counter-terrorism prosecution, etc.

The central question remains the same: given the urgency and spillover effects of such a crisis, will our States finally agree to recognise the primacy of shared interests?

This question necessarily begs another question if these States, once confronted with their collective responsibilities, persist in passing the buck. It would therefore fall to citizens, if they are to live up to this description, to ask this question clearly: where are the real friends and foes of Europeans themselves?

Bruno Vever (AFM)

“EMERITUS” MEMBERS OF THE EESC AND GOING LOCAL: the case of biomedical engineering.

This year's annual assembly of former members (or better, as Giannino Bernabei suggests, «emeritus» members) has just drawn to a close, with a discussion that touched on future prospects and action on the part of members. A subject that was raised by various speakers, and was underlined in Antonello Pezzini's eloquent presentation, was Going Local, in other words how best to use the “emeritus” members' wealth of experience and contacts for the benefit of associations and their home countries. Among the tasks of an EESC rapporteur is that of presenting and publicising opinions for the six-month period following adoption, although it is not necessary to have been the rapporteur of a particular opinion if the member is familiar with the subject. Regrettably, the combination of personal professional commitments and EESC activities means that this aspect is frequently neglected. The “emeritus» members could play a role here, both for opinions that they have drafted and for those in areas where they have expertise.

I was rapporteur for an opinion on biomedical engineering, proposed by our Austrian friend and colleague Dirk Jarré, with Silvia Zinetti as the rapporteur's expert, adopted at the plenary session on 23 April 2015 and published in the Official Journal on 4 September.

In July last year, two MEPs (Lara Comi, EPP, and Nicola Caputo, S&D) submitted two written questions to the European Commission in which they explicitly referred to our opinion.

I was invited by the Italian Association of Engineers' national committee on bioengineering to present the opinion in Milan; the meeting decided that a reference to the opinion should be proposed at the national congress. The Association's national council adopted a final document on 2 October in Venice which also included (in point 27) an explicit reference to the EESC opinion.

In December last year, the Commission replied to the MEPs' questions, one of which raised the issue of why the profession of biomedical engineer had not been recognised in Directive 2005/36/EC on professional qualifications, and urged steps to be taken to this end at national level.

In March this year, the board of the European Alliance for Medical and Biological Engineering and Science (EAMBES) arranged a conference call during which I explained in detail the contents of the opinion.

The opinion has been an extraordinary catalyst, galvanising a process that has been under way for years in Italy and Europe.

Also in March, together with the chairs of the two working groups of the International Federation for Medical and Biological Engineering (IFMBE), Ernesto Iadanza and Leandro Pecchia, the head of Medicaldev, Luca Radice, Manuela Appendino, a biomedical engineer who has already designed and produced new life-saving cardiological devices, and Teresa Maisto, a clinical engineer at a major multinational in charge of supplying devices to six hospitals in the city of Catania, we founded the Committee to promote legal recognition of the work, research and professions of biomedical and clinical engineer, of which I (in deference to my age...) have been appointed president.

The president of the scientific committee is Professor Andrea Corvi, course convenor for the master's degree in biomedical engineering run by the University of Florence's Engineering Department and coordinator of the university's second level master's degree in clinical engineering. Leading figures in academia, the professions, research, associations and the Association of Engineers have been invited to sit on the scientific committee.

I was invited by the Italian Association of Clinical Engineering to present a summary of the opinion and outline the Committee's objectives at their 16th national congress in Bari on 7 to 9 April.

On 31 May, a number of MEPs, spurred on by the EESC opinion, will be launching the first interparliamentary group on biomedical engineering, and have invited me to give a speech.

The EESC could draw up a new opinion on the subject, something that would be of great added value for research and would meet the expectations of young people; above all, however, it would help create the conditions for a dramatic improvement in health services and patient well-being.

There will also be other initiatives, and these we can discuss in the future.

Going Local is, then, feasible, and will cost the EESC and the Association nothing.

Making a contribution right at the very heart of Europe (also metaphorically, in the case of the EESC) will, at a moment of historic importance, counteract the forces of polarisation, individualism and nationalism and, instead, draw attention to the many positive things that have come out of the European Union. This is how we can continue to play an active part in the wider process of integration and in strengthening European ideals.

Edgardo Maria Iozia (AFM)



OXFORD - future host city



The Association of Former Members is organising a study trip to Oxford and the surrounding area on **14-18 September** this year. This is a joint initiative by Robert Moreland and Kenneth Walker.

The main theme of the trip is education in Great Britain, and it will focus on several areas including artificial intelligence, which is set to affect more than 47% of professions in civil society in future. The association will have an opportunity to visit Oxford Instruments, a leading scientific instrument producer, Culham EU Research Centre and the European School, Gloucester, as well as Blenheim Palace, home of the Dukes of Marlborough and birthplace of Winston Churchill.

Participants will stay at University College, in Oxford High Street.

Given the success of previous trips, the number of participants is limited to 50 and places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.



REGISTRATION

The annual subscription is EUR 70 and must be paid into the bank account of the Association of Former Members of the EESC, **ING bank: IBAN BE02 3101 7336 3540 – BIC: BBRUBEBB.**



“To mark the 10th anniversary of the Economic and Social Committee of the European Communities, His Majesty King Baudouin of the Belgians welcomed the Committee president Louis Major, the vice-presidents, the secretary general [Jacques Genton] and members of Bureau of the Assembly. At the reception, the Committee president presented his colleagues to the King and highlighted the unique character of

the Economic and Social Committee, a body that brings together representatives of various economic and social categories of the Community, thus contributing to the economic, intellectual and moral integration of the six signatory countries of the Treaty of Rome.”

From International Associations, August 1968, No. 8, p. 558

General Coordination: Domenico Cosmai

Editorial Team: Maria Cossu, Natalia Schneiderová, Stefano Soattin

Layout: Filip Van Landegem

Contributors: Tatiana Adamišová, Gabrielle Bergen, Marián Brestovanský, Roger Briesch, Sonia Calvy, Maria Cossu, Henriks Danusevics, Georges Dassis, Silvia Giaccon, Merve Güngör, Edgardo Maria Iozia, Luca Jahier, Peter Javorčík, Giovanni Mantovani, Béatrice Ouin, Viliam Páleník, Luis Planas, Antonio Polica, Natália Schneiderová, Bruno Vever, Sylvia Zdziech

CONNECT is the newsletter of the Association of Former Members of the European Economic and Social Committee. The publication is also open to external contributions. The published articles reflect the opinions of the authors and are not necessarily representative of the positions of the editorial board or the European Economic and Social Committee.



European Economic and Social Committee

Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99, 1040 Bruxelles/Brussel
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

Published by: “Visits and Publications” Unit

www.eesc.europa.eu

© European Union, 2016

Reproduction is authorised provided
the source is acknowledged.



EN