On 27 April, European Parliament voted in favour of making 2018 the European Year of Cultural Heritage. This is the first European Year with a clear cultural focus since 2009 (European Year for intercultural Dialogue).

A European Commission study reveals that an estimated 300,000 people work directly in the EU’s cultural sector and as many as 7.8 million jobs are created indirectly by the sector.

Heritage has a social and educational value which not only contributes to job creation and economy, but also enhances the profile of the EU internationally. This is also what Luca Jahier states in his opinion “Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations”. The EU and its Member States must allow culture, which is the foundation and cement of our European identity, to come to the fore as a powerful instrument in its own right. Culture has an enormous untapped potential for becoming a unifying and mobilising instrument in Europe.

At precisely this time when European citizens are questioning their common identity more than ever since 1945.

These views are also shared by Silvia Costa, MEP and former Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, who has been one of the main supporters of the proposed Year within the European Parliament. Mrs Costa recently stated that “Culture and cultural heritage should be the new soul and new identity for a new Europe.”

Now is the time to promote cultural heritage as a pivotal component of cultural diversity and inter-cultural dialogue. Now is the time to highlight the best means to ensure conservation, safeguarding of cultural heritage and enjoyment by a wider and more diverse audience.

In parallel, on 31 May, the EESC will hold a plenary debate on the opinion on an EU strategy for international cultural relations with rapporteur Luca Jahier, President of the Various Interests’ Group. The proposals will be presented to Culture Commissioner Tibor Navracsics.

While welcoming the Joint Communication “Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations”, the draft EESC opinion urges the Commission to move further and adopt a clear strategy and EU Action Plan for cultural diplomacy, taking advantage of the momentum created by the 2018 Year for European Cultural Heritage.

The opinion also calls for a full recognition of culture as a pillar of sustainable development, and for making cultural relations a top priority in the coming year.

More information on the adopted EESC opinion will be published in the next newsletter.
Culture, Cities and Identity in Europe

Last year, a study was commissioned by the Various Interests’ Group to examine culture thematically in terms of its use as a vehicle for economic growth, a tool for reconverting cities and territories, for integration and inclusiveness and as a pillar of European identity. The study was written by Culture Action Europe and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG-Agenda 21 for culture).

Download the full study:

Download the executive summary:

Visit the Culture Action Europe website:
http://cultureactioneurope.org/

Visit the United Cities and Local Governments website:
https://www.uclg.org/
On 4th May, the Various Interests’ Group of the EESC organized a high level working seminar in Brussels. The seminar examined the draft recommendation of the Group III conference ‘Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development: a new frontier of rights and progress for the EU’, which took place at the premises of the EESC, on 22 and 23 May. These draft recommendations will be revised and distributed after the conference.

Participants in this meeting included Group III Presidency, Group III Members active on topic, as well as Brenda King who is the President of the SDO, plus of course the external participants who represent academia, institutions and civil society, but also key personalities, e.g. Brice Lalonde, Enrico Giovannini.

The draft recommendations consist of a Preamble which sets the scene and calls on all actors to imagine a new world, to take risks, to create a sustainable culture among Europeans and ultimately, to render the UN 2030 Agenda a European Social Contract of the 21st Century.

A report on the conference of 22-23 May will be published in our July edition.
EESC to hold consultations with civil society and government representatives

The EESC held a series of national debates to hear European civil society’s views on the five scenarios for the future development of Europe outlined by Jean-Claude Juncker in the European Commission’s *White Paper on the Future of Europe*, which offered five scenarios for how Europe could develop by 2025 in different areas, such as, among others, single market and trade, migration and security or economic and monetary union.

The national debates took place during the month of May 2017. Participants in the debates included representatives of civil society (employers, trade unions and NGOs) and government representatives. The debates were hosted by delegations of three EESC members.

Ideas presented during the debates will feed into the EESC’s upcoming opinion on the Future of Europe to be issued in July 2017, following the Commission referral to the EESC, the EU body representing Europe’s civil society. This opinion aims to influence the EU’s decision on the course of action to take in the years to come and the future shape of Europe, ahead of the EU elections in June 2019.

The future of Europe!

When the European Commission published its White Paper on the Future of Europe on 1 March to mark the 60th Anniversary of the EU, the project of European integration was in the balance. Since then, following the Dutch and French elections, some of the black clouds that loomed over the future of the EU have dissipated.

However, it would be a serious mistake to become complacent and believe that the long-term viability of the project of peace and prosperity begun in 1957 by a handful of visionaries is out of danger. On the contrary: a long and winding road lies ahead of us. Increased protectionism, insecurity, terrorism, inequality, poverty, climate change and emigration, to mention just a few, are all challenges that could undermine Europeans’ support for the EU. Paradoxically, the only way to address them effectively is through coordinated European and global action, for which a strong EU is paramount.

The study group that the EESC has set up to reflect on the future of the EU offers civil society a good platform to contribute to this critical debate. While much has been said and written, I think there is room to put forward new ideas. We should be analytical in our assessment and bold in our recommendations.

A former occupant of the White House said that “the future belongs to the brave”. Likewise, the future of the EU belongs to the brave. If we are not brave, as the EU founders were six decades ago, unfortunately the EU will not have the future it deserves. Let us all (policy-makers, social agents, citizens, etc.) shoulder our roles and responsibilities and be equal to the huge task ahead.

President Jahier opened the conference, stating that as President of the Various Interests Group of the EESC, he believed full-heartedly in the important role and contribution of civil society to the future of the EU.

For this reason, the EESC decided at its last plenary session to organise national debates in all EU Member States, to discuss directly with civil society on what the future of the EU should entail, going beyond the five scenarios presented in the EC White Paper. He explained how these consultations will feed directly into the EESC Opinion which will be sent to the EC, while showing similarities with the civil society consultations linked to the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In addition to this commitment, President Jahier put to the audience two proposals which in his view should become the epicentre of the Europe of the Future.

The first, relates to the sustainable development agenda of 2030 and the necessity to strategically place sustainable development, in its economic, social and environmental dimensions, at the heart of the Europe of tomorrow. President Jahier insisted that European citizens must wake up to the reality of change and transition and render sustainable development a positive narrative for Europe, in which civil society plays a key role as an ally and a partner.

Secondly, President Jahier made the plea for a greater role for Culture in our society. He closed by saying that (…) ‘now is the time to continue building our Europe, our future and that of our children!’

Luca JAHIER (IT)
President of the Various Interests’ Group
Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

EDF’s Annual General Assembly (AGA) in Madrid, Spain, this weekend brought together over 200 participants, including AGA delegates, observers, partners, guests and members of the global disability movement. The meeting was hosted by EDF Spanish members, CERMI and ONCE Foundation. A conference was also organised in the framework of the AGA to mark EDF’s 20th anniversary.

Entitled ‘20 years later: Building an inclusive disability movement for the future’, the conference was an opportunity to recall the great achievements of the disability movement in the last 20 years, but also to identify the challenges ahead and how the disability movement should address these challenges.

Opening the meeting, EDF President, Yannis Vardakastanis, recalled the advances that persons with disabilities have experienced in their lives in the last 20 years. He also highlighted the great importance of the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) by the European Union (EU). However, he also talked about the responsibility of the EU to stand by the side of its citizens and improve the living conditions of all people including those with disabilities.

President of the Various Interests’ Group of the EESC Luca Jahier presented the work that the EESC does to promote disability rights and the implementation of the CRPD. He also called on the EU to develop a clear and comprehensive disability rights agenda following the recommendation by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. “When I think of the disability movement, I think of values, rights, people and sustainable development”, he concluded.

On Monday 24 April 2017, the EESC’s Group III hosted the second plenary meeting of the European Justice Stakeholders Forum. EESC Group III vice-president Arno Metzler opened the meeting by explaining why the group was supporting the event.

European citizens needed a better justice service: it was essential to improve law enforcement and regulation. The EESC was the only civil society body that could advocate on citizens’ behalf for equal access to justice in all the Member States, access to justice which ordinary people could understand and trust. The different levels of legal competence must be more closely linked and there should be no contradictions. There had to be more dialogue and communication about different legal traditions, and mutual trust must be improved. Legal proceedings and special laws had to be phased better than at present e.g. in family law, consumer protection etc. The duration of procedural processes must be shortened radically. It was crucial for all players in the sphere of European justice to serve citizens.

The panels discussed a number of issues. The debate on digitalisation and access to justice was moderated by Diana Wallis of the European Law Institute. Therese Comodini Cachia MEP, Heidi Hautala MEP, and members of legal organisations agreed that digitalisation was necessary to increase effectiveness of justice, but algorithms could not replace judges and the other human elements of legal proceedings.
Christine Sullivan of Fragomen legal practice moderated a discussion on rethinking EU citizenship in the light of Brexit, where interesting views were expressed by Pedro Silva Perreira MEP, Helena Raulus from the UK Law Society, and others. This panel looked at legal questions affecting both citizens in the EU and in the UK.

Jacquelyn MacLennan of White & Case Brussels moderated a discussion on the effect of the UNGPs on business and human rights for EU lawyers, citizens and businesses. Anne-Marie Mineur MEP, Graham Smith from the private office of the of the European Ombudsman, Daphne Gogou and Pedro Ortúñ from DG Justice, and others highlighted the personal responsibility of all advisors and other parties to legal processes for the protection of human rights in public and private legal processes and contracts to ensure that the law was properly enforced.

Paul Nemitz, Director for Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law in DG Justice, gave the closing speech, which addressed access to justice under EU law. He underlined the efforts of the European Commission to strengthen access to information about secondary rights, the opening of areas of national security to citizen rights and training of judges in new technologies, etc.

The luncheon speech was given by Judge Wojciech Postulski of the European Judicial Training Network, who gave an overview of efforts to enable national judges to work with the law of other EU countries in those areas where this has been agreed under EU law.

In his closing remarks Arno Metzler expressed his sincere hope that the meeting of the EJSF would become a regular annual event.

New Economy Models and Social Innovation

The EESC, the New Economy and Social Innovation (NESI) Global Forum and the Global Hub for the Common Good joined forces to enrich the European debate with input from communities directly involved in the collaborative, circular and functional economies.

Last 16 February, the EESC brought together representatives from the public and private sectors to explore the opportunities the new economies present for the EU. Themed New Economy Models and Social Innovation: an opportunity for a better Europe, the event aimed to contribute towards the dialogue between the European Commission and civil society and to the shaping of EU legislation in these areas.

A follow-up event subsequently took place in Malaga, Spain, on 19-22 April, with these players pooling resources to lay the foundations of a fairer and more sustainable, collaborative and people-oriented economy, such as Group III Member Carlos Trías Pintó, Rapporteur of the Collaborative Economy EESC Opinion.

Next, a report from Diego Isabel La Moneda, Co-founder of the Global Hub for the Common Good and Director of the NESI Global Forum.

New Economy and Social Innovation

The Global Forum NESI “New Economy and Social Innovation” in Málaga on 19 to 22 April marked a turning point in the history of the global economy. For the first time, the main representatives of the “new economy models” met with a clear goal: working together to create a more sustainable, fair, collaborative and people-oriented new economy. Economy for the Common Good, Social and Solidarity Economy, Circular Economy, Social Enterprises, Collaborative Economy, the Global Alliance for Banking on Values, The Next System Project or Transition Towns are just some of the many global networks and organisations that took part in the NESI Forum. Moreover, NESI was also attended by business people, academics, NGOs, social movements and representatives of public institutions, including municipalities, regional and national governments, and members of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee.

“The goal and purpose of the new economy will be to serve people and the planet”

On the first day, the Global Hub for the Common Good - an open think tank that is the main organiser of the NESI Forum - presented the “NESI Charter”, a collaborative statement shaped by hundreds of people from the five continents and supported by representatives of the new economy models that participated in NESI. The Charter states that “The goal and purpose of the new economy will be to serve people and the planet” and it defines five strategies for catalysing the transition towards this new model.

With the intention of moving towards this new economy, the forum was organised around four main strands: “Rethinking money: the future of banking and finances”, “Reshaping organisations for the common good”, “Globalisation and localisation: trade, food, energy and resilient communities” and “Learning and training for a new economy”. Four days of collaborative work produced 100 specific proposals aimed at jointly creating a better economy. These proposals cover a wide range of measures, such as policies to be applied at local, national, European and global level, networking activities for businesses aligned with the new economy values or campaigns to promote informed consumption.

What about Europe?

We know that change is always difficult and slow in Europe. However, if we want to meet the main challenges before us, we need to transform our economy and we need to move fast. Civil society, academia, NGOs and businesses agreed on the strategies and first steps to move forward. This is an outstanding opportunity for Europe to jointly create a new economy aligned with European values. European citizens and organisations are ready to work together and catalyse change and they are willing to work with European institutions. They know that a new economy based on social innovation is an opportunity for a better Europe.

http://neweconomyforum.org/
http://commongoodhub.com
http://commongoodhub.com/the-nesi-charter/
Exiled Turkish journalist debates media freedom and human rights with EESC

Following recent developments in Turkey, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) invited Turkish journalist Can Dündar to its Plenary session on 26th April. The former editor-in-chief of the Turkish newspaper Cumhuriyet, currently living in exile, called on the EU to stand beside Turkey and the Turkish people in support of media freedom, human rights, rule of law and democracy. The EESC debate also assessed recent developments in Turkey and discussed EU-Turkey relations.

Luca JAHIER (IT)
President of the Various Interests Group of the EESC

There is no doubt that even in recent years there has been a delicate relationship between us with a fine equilibrium, taking full account of size, geography, politics, trade and realpolitik.

Today, Turkey remains a candidate country, and is a full NATO member and more recently, in 2001, Turkish government representatives sat as Observers alongside EU Member States, during the discussions on the Laeken Convention. But how things have changed! For let us not forget that when Mr Erdogan came to power in 2003, encouraged by the IMF, he tamed inflation and ushered in economic growth, foreign investment soared and the country became Europe's workshop. Similarly, encouraged by the EU, the AK party strengthened civil liberties and talked peace with the Kurds.

Unfortunately today the AK party's reaction to last years' failed coup and the new Constitution are an embodiment of 'illiberal democracy' and 'elected dictatorship'.

Mr Dundar was recognised globally as an outspoken critic of the Erdogan government, stating "Turkey is not only Erdogan. There is a great Turkey, a big Turkey which wants democracy". For such views, he and his family have paid a very high price. And many of our Central and Eastern European Members who also lived through decades of authoritarian regimes are better suited than me to offer words of encouragement and praise. Unfortunately the aspiration of EU Membership has not been a sufficient positive 'pul' on civil liberties in Turkey, and those who never believed in the model of democratic Islam, will feel justified in their views. At the bilateral level, we are clearly entering a phase of turbulence and uncertain relations between Turkey and the EU - the future is unknown. Some countries have been very vocal in criticising the AK regime, others have been more diplomatic. In the minds of all is the EU-Turkey agreement on the return of migrants.

The EESC is monitoring the latest developments in Turkey. In its joint declaration of December 2016 in Ankara, the EU-Turkey Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee strongly condemned all terrorist attacks, and stressed that the right to fair trial and due process should be upheld and that all measures taken should further strengthen democracy, civil rights and social cohesion, respecting universal fundamental rights, the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law.

We strongly believe that it is in the interests of both Turkey and the EU to move decisively and irreversibly towards a pluralist, peaceful society, where freedom of expression and of association are important principles, and where all the components of civil society, including minorities of every kind, may exist and speak out without fear.

As president of the REX section, I can assure you that human rights and media freedom will continue to be at the top of the agenda with our Turkish partners within the EU-Turkey JCC. To conclude, I would like to stress that even though the situation in Turkey is difficult, the EESC will continue to have regular contact with civil society organisations in Turkey in order to demonstrate to them our support and convey their concerns to the EU institutions. Thank you for your work and courage!

Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)
National Association “Mountain Milk”
Member of the Various Interests' Group
President of REX section

Turkey is its people, the living force of its society. It is this Turkey that we have to continue working with. We hope to return to a Turkey that is democratic, open to the future, and that respects liberties and the rule of law separation of power – and it is the role of civil society, academia and the media to keep open these avenues of communication and support.
On 26 April, Group III members and EDF President met with European Parliament President Antonio Tajani, who expressed his commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities and to collaboration with EDF. The implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), the 4th European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities, the right to vote in the European elections in 2019 and the Accessibility Act were at the heart of the discussion.

President Tajani addressed the important need for the European Parliament's offices at national level to work in partnership with the national representative organisations of persons with disabilities. He also spoke of formalising the cooperation between the European Parliament and EDF.

Mr Vardakastanis, stressed the importance of the implementation of the CRPD by the European Union (EU), while also referring to the link of the CRPD with the recently published European Pillar of Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; both in line with the CRPD and inclusive of persons with disabilities.

On 20 and 21 April, the delegation held bilateral meetings with organisations with an interest in policies on and the situation of persons with disabilities. The meetings focused on the employment of people with disabilities from the point of view of policies and discussed how their situation at European level can be improved.

The aim of the work programme was to share knowledge, experiences and best practice regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.

On 27 April, Arno Metzler, EESC rapporteur for the single market package together with the co-rapporteur, Stefano Palmieri from Group II presented the final draft prepared by the INT/815 study group to the coordinator of the SD EP Group Nicola Danti MEP and his rapporteur for the Notification Regulation, Sergio Gutierrez Pietro MEP from Spain. Mr Metzler pointed out that the study group had focused on the sensible balance of competences between policy makers in the EU and the Member States. He supported the EESC's proposal for a less interfering model of legal cooperation. The EESC proposal was very aware of national sensitivities.

The MEPs present appreciated the EESC's helpful position. DG Growth was represented by Dr Hemingi Ehrenstein who strongly opposed the critical position of the socialist MEPs.
A better life in rural areas is the theme of the Cork 2.0 Declaration that was the result of a two-day interactive conference in Cork, Ireland in September 2016. It was initiated by Commissioner Hogan and strongly supports a rural policy in the EU.

Group III member Sofia Björnsson is the rapporteur for an own-initiative opinion on the declaration and how the declaration can be put into effect. The declaration is very broad and covers all aspects of sustainable development in and of rural areas. Jobs and services, environmental impact, climate change, food production, governance, innovation and digitisation are some of the key factors that need to be addressed in a rural policy and that are highlighted in the opinion.

The Cork 2.0 Declaration takes a broad approach to rural development, and its strength lies in its scope and content, as it covers all of the elements needed for a viable and sustainable rural environment in the EU. The declaration offers strong ongoing support for a rural policy at EU level. Now is the time to put the Cork 2.0 Declaration into action. The trend towards systematic prioritisation of urban areas across the whole set of EU sectoral policies must be reversed!
The second Croatian Rural Parliament was held from 20 to 22 April 2017 in Sveti Martin na Muri in north west Croatia, under the heading “Integrated Development Through Cooperation”. More than 300 participants from all over Croatia took part in this event - representatives of LAGs and other rural development associations, professional and scientific organisations, ministries, regional and local governments, entrepreneurs, farmers, craftsmen and other rural development stakeholders.

The topic of cooperation was chosen as it is a prerequisite for integrated development. It encompasses cooperation between rural community stakeholders, cooperation with the public administration, the business sector, interdisciplinary cooperation with the research and academic community as well as cooperation based on sharing experience and learning from best practice.

The Parliament started with an introductory plenary session, followed by the rural café on topics such as innovative approaches to agriculture, the concept of “zero kilometre”: local food on the local table, and the heritage and identity of rural areas as a starting point for development. Interesting scientific research projects and rural-area projects contributing to improving living conditions in rural areas were presented on posters under the heading “Interdisciplinary Collaboration to Better Quality of Living in Rural Areas”.

During the second day, a panel discussion on rural development programmes was held with important stakeholders, representatives of ministries and regional authorities, the Croatian rural development network president, a European Parliament member, members of the European Economic and Social Committee and representatives of international rural networks.

The EESC representatives took an active part and contributed to the quality of the conference. Violeta Jelč from Group I and Tom Jones from Group III were involved in the panel on rural development programmes, and Lidija Pavic-Rogošić from Group III moderated the rural café session and a workshop on an innovative approach to local communities.

The last day of the Parliament was dedicated to the presentation of the findings of the workshops, the conclusions and adoption of the Declaration, a press conference and a tour of Medjimurje.

The Parliament was organised by the Croatian rural development network - HMRR, LAG Medjimurski doli i bregi, the municipality of Sveti Martin and Lifeclass Spa Sveti Martin.
The EESC welcomes the “clean energy” package, which aims to accelerate, transform and consolidate the EU economy’s clean energy transition, while pursuing the important goals of economic growth and job creation. The proposed package includes important proposals in the areas of renewable energies and electricity market design and regulation, energy efficiency and energy performance of buildings, energy innovation, transport, and governance – and the Committee views many of the initiatives favourably.

However, the opinion – drawing on nine other opinions concerned with the individual proposals of the clean energy package – also identifies a number of challenges that civil society and co-legislators need to bear in mind. Among these challenges are the following: First, while recognising and appreciating the positive and optimistic message of the Commission’s communication, especially regarding industrial output and employment linked to renewable energies, the Committee sees a need to also highlight the potential risks associated with the transition process. Secondly, the EESC appreciates the emphasis on the centrality of the citizens and consumers in the Energy Union but questions whether the regulatory proposals are specific enough to achieve this. Thirdly, energy efficiency and renewable energies are key to achieving the EU’s climate goals but there are concerns whether the energy market offers the level of playing field that renewable energies need to compete with other fuel sources. Fourthly, the Committee has deep concerns as to whether the Governance proposal is sufficient to address potential implementation and ambition gaps at Member state level. Fifthly, the EESC appreciates that the EU plans to set up an Energy Poverty Observatory but stresses that there remains a need for a coordinated approach to combatting energy poverty. Finally, the EESC is concerned about the financial underpinnings of the package.

At its plenary session on 26-27 April 2017 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.

**Overview of our Members’ Work in the EESC**


The EESC prioritises the need for the Directive to contain more specific proposals to tackle the challenge of energy poverty. This should include inter alia delivery of advice and coordination of measures through the agency of an independent, consumer-focussed “one-stop-shop” or agency. The EESC notes that the Directive has not taken the opportunity to encourage “green” mortgages, renewable energy-linked district heating schemes, measures for residential and commercial energy storage, improved training schemes for installers and renovators and other technical, financial and fiscal measures which would support better energy efficiency in buildings.

Additional steps should be taken to encourage the comparability of calculation methods for Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) across Member States. Moreover, the non-specific proposal for a “smartness indicator” must include the capacity of a building’s occupants not only to assess energy efficiency but also to control and facilitate their own renewable energy production and consumption and cut energy bills.

The EESC emphasises the need to encourage building construction and renovation and notes that, without innovation, it will be impossible to increase the energy performance of buildings. An effort must be made in training to adapt the skills required for these highly specialised sectors.

**TEN/624 - Clean Energy for all Package**

The EESC welcomes the “clean energy” package, which aims to accelerate, transform and consolidate the EU economy’s clean energy transition, while pursuing the important goals of economic growth and job creation. The proposed package includes important proposals in the areas of renewable energies and electricity market design and regulation, energy efficiency and energy performance of buildings, energy innovation, transport, and governance – and the Committee views many of the initiatives favourably.

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**TEN/622 - Revision of the Renewable Energies Directive**

The EESC welcomes the European Commission’s proposal for a recast of the Directive for the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources. Increasing the share of renewable energies is of significant importance for achieving the objectives of the Energy Union and complying with the climate commitments of the EU. The Committee takes the view that the proposal contains many positive elements, among them, the acknowledgement of the environmental, economic, and social benefits of renewable energies and recognition of prosumers and energy cooperatives as new players on the energy markets.

However, the EESC argues that the proposal could have gone further: First, there are concerns that the binding EU target for the share of renewable energies of 27% (combined with the absence of binding national targets) by 2030 may not suffice to achieve the goals in relation to GHG reduction goals and global renewa-
Understanding FinTech requires new skills from all: regulators, supervision industry and FinTech companies, in line with the rule of the conditions and supervisory obligations, both for the traditional finance industry. As a general principle, broadly analogous conditions are needed in terms of regulation as well as consumer rights, working conditions and supervisory obligations, both for the traditional finance industry and FinTech companies, in line with the rule of the same activity requiring the same regulation and the same supervision.

The EESC fully supports the notion that renewable energies should be exposed to market competition but remarks that a prerequisite for this is the existence of a level-playing field on the market (including the internalisation of external costs, the elimination of subsidies for all energy fuels, and a market design that does not discriminate against smaller-scale production). Thirdly, the Committee views the inclusion in the proposal of prosumers and energy cooperatives favourably but identifies needs for further measures to consolidate and strengthen their role on the energy market. Fourthly, the EESC would like to emphasise the importance of installing and extending a smart grid across Europe in order to allow for sector-coupling and increase market flexibility. Fifthly, the EESC recognises that biofuels, in particular advanced biofuels, if deployed in a sustainable manner, have an important role to play in particular in the transport sector. However, it is important – when discussing biofuels – to also take into account the future role of electro-mobility.

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

To achieve a truly Single European Financial Market, European Commission policy should support a level playing field in terms of innovation. As a general principle, broadly analogous conditions are needed in terms of regulation as well as consumer rights, working conditions and supervisory obligations, both for the traditional finance industry and FinTech companies, in line with the rule of the same activity requiring the same regulation and the same supervision.

Understand FinTech requires new skills from all: regulators, supervisors, financial ecosystem stakeholders and the population as a whole. Digitalisation in the financial sector threatens many jobs, and this is forcing employees to update their competences and skills. The EESC advocates ensuring that skills training and further education take place on two levels. Internally, by allowing employees to take on new tasks and create a cross-over between current financial employees from “traditional institutions” and FinTech/InsurTech companies, and externally by preparing employees who cannot remain in the sector for jobs in other sectors.

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

The EESC welcomes the Commission proposal for a new European Consensus on Development, which brings this overarching EU development policy document fully in line with the 2030 Agenda. The Committee acknowledges the role the 2005 European Consensus on Development has played in development cooperation both at the level of the EU and Member States. The Committee expects that the new Consensus will continue to play a similar role.

The EESC salutes the explicit commitment of the Consensus to the overarching goal of eradicating poverty, on a rights-based approach to development cooperation and on gender equality, ensuring that under the 2030 Agenda no-one is left behind wherever they live and regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, migration status or other status.

The Committee takes the view that the Consensus should attempt to define the roles of the Commission and of Member States, taking into account their specific comparative advantage in the field of development. That has become even more relevant as it is expected that the total allocation for development by the EU and its Member States will come under further pressure in a changing domestic political environment. This also implies that the EU and its Member States should not use development aid as leverage to impose cooperation on development cooperation partners for economic and foreign policy goals, for state security and migration control.

The EESC believes that the foundation for inclusion and sustainability is decent and stable jobs, particularly for women and young people, which generate sufficient revenue and sustainable value chains for the range of consolidated public services.

ADOPTED
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**Mihai IVAȘCU (RO)**  
Chamber of commerce and industry of Romania  
Member of the Various Interests’ Group

**ECO/427 - Terrorism Financing – Controls of cash movements**

The EESC believes that the fight against terrorism and its financing and efforts to combat money laundering and other related forms of economic crime should be permanent EU policy priorities. The EESC expresses its support for the measures introduced in the Commission's proposal to adjust it to the current situation and address the shortcomings identified in various studies on its implementation.

The EESC believes that the expansion of the scope of controls and the competency of the authorities in order to conduct checks and confiscate goods, whenever there is a reasonable indication of illicit activities, will facilitate the discovery of more fraudulent cases and gather more information. The EESC considers it necessary to improve cooperation, both between the competent authorities and between Member States, in order to achieve the maximum effect in applying the new regulation.

The EESC proposes that, following a study and extensive consultations, the Commission should put together a plan for reducing the use of cash in the EU and thus the adequacy of the EUR 10 000 threshold could be reconsidered. The EESC considers that, in addition to gold, other “highly liquid commodities” should be included in the definition of cash from the moment the new regulation is adopted and the Committee draws attention to the threat of further use of pre-paid cards by criminals and terrorists to covertly finance their activities.

The EESC reiterates its concern that tax havens in which the most significant money laundering takes place – and whose cash flows with the EU should in particular be monitored – are not featured in the list of countries and regions considered by the Commission in the list of high risk third countries.

The complete texts of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee’s website: [http://dm.eesc.europa.eu/EESCDocumentSearch/Pages/opinionssearch.aspx](http://dm.eesc.europa.eu/EESCDocumentSearch/Pages/opinionssearch.aspx)
ERASMUS+
the programme which raises true European leaders

This year we celebrate the 30th birthday of the Erasmus programme, the programme which has enriched the lives of millions of young Europeans. Indrė Vareikytė is rapporteur for the opinion “Mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+”. This opinion will be adopted at the May plenary and aims to further improve access to the Erasmus program.

The original Erasmus began in 1987 as a pilot scheme for student exchanges. And over the 30 years since then, it has become much more than a student exchange. Today, Erasmus+ offers a large number of opportunities for volunteers, vocational education trainees and adult learners of any age; it actively ensures strong cooperation between the education and training sectors and the labour market, and online collaborative platforms enable people with very diverse backgrounds to be included in building a more cohesive European society. Sport has also become an important part of Erasmus+.

Over 2 million people from all possible backgrounds have already taken the opportunity to study, train, volunteer and gain experience abroad since the launch of Erasmus+ in 2014, with 5 million in total taking part over the past 30 years.

Various researches prove that Erasmus also opens up employment opportunities. Mobile higher education students are twice as likely to have a job one year after graduation compared to their non-mobile peers. Volunteering also boosts participants’ chances of finding a job, as three out of four employers value such experience. Such skills as self-confidence, adaptability and strong communication are gained through an Erasmus experience.

In 2014, the European Commission decided to create Erasmus+, a single framework programme which combined all EU schemes for education, training, youth and sport. The aim was to make programmes for education, training and youth more effective and to bring them closer to each other, thus providing the beneficiaries with more opportunities.

Did the European Commission succeed? This is exactly the question we try to answer in the Erasmus+ mid-term evaluation report. In our report, we tackle such topics as effectiveness, administrative issues, budget, quality of the activities, programme recognition, awareness within national political circles, lifelong learning dimension, EU added value, etc.

Especially in view of the youth unemployment crisis, investments in youth, including the Erasmus+ programme, have become even more important than before. We hear very often from many politicians. But in reality, only EUR 28 is spent per young person per year in the EU, and the budget for education, training and youth accounts for only 0.8% of the EU budget. Could the investment in our future be bigger? It definitely could.

30 years of Erasmus have proved that you can never invest too much in youth. So #longlivErasmus, and I hope that we will see even more rewarding results after 30 more years.

Indre VAREIKYTĖ (LT)
Lithuanian Youth Council
Member of the Various Interests’ Group
In 2015, the Dutch nature and environmental organisations obtained a position in the EESC for the first time, a position which I had the opportunity to occupy. After a year and a half of membership it is time to share some experiences.

My ‘constituency’ is the Groene11, a partnership focusing on lobbying at national and European level that brings together the main Dutch nature and environmental organisations with approximately 2.5 million members or donors. I took up my mandate with the aim of opening up a new channel for nature and environmental organisations to have their message included in the European decision-making process via the EESC.

Now that we are conducting a mid-term review following our initial experiences, the conclusion is that membership of the EESC has opened up that new channel for the organisations. In order to do this we use the following effective and efficient approach.

When I take part in a study group, I inform the organisations of Groene11 that have expertise on that subject. I send the rapporteur’s first draft to these organisations, which comment on it and raise issues. From those largely valuable and expert comments I select those that are essential, key and/or politically relevant and subsequently put the points forward during the study group meetings, as well as to the rapporteur by email as drafting suggestions. Naturally, I consult the organisations on how to respond to the subsequent versions of the opinion.

The following are two recent examples of opinions I have been involved in. Concerning opinion TEN/620, Revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, I contacted the expert from Natuur & Milieu (the leading environmental organisation dealing with energy in the Netherlands). Out of the points the expert came up with, I chose as the key focus the proposal that the EESC should insist that Member States commit to a higher level of ambition in their plans than that opted for by the European Commission, without them being compelled to do so by the EU. It was well-known that if the Commission opted for greater ambition with all the coercion described, the Member States would challenge the directive as a whole. The rapporteur Baiba Miltovica included this contribution in her own words in the final version of the opinion adopted (see inter alia point 1.3 of the opinion).

I am currently contributing to opinion NAT/703, A possible reshaping of the Common Agricultural Policy, which is being drafted by John Bryan. Natuurmonumenten and Vogelsescherming are the two environmental organisations leading the debate on the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) in the Netherlands. I am in constant contact with them concerning the development of the opinion. Our aim is to have our own vision clearly included in the opinion, taking into account the views and interests of other interested parties and the political and public debates on the CAP (for example: not asking for more money!). In this context, I have greatly benefited from my own experience in public debates on the CAP (for example: not asking for more money!). I have taken part in a study group, I inform the organisations of Groene11 that have expertise on that subject. I send the rapporteur’s first draft to these organisations, which comment on it and raise issues. From those largely valuable and expert comments I select those that are essential, key and/or politically relevant and subsequently put the points forward during the study group meetings, as well as to the rapporteur by email as drafting suggestions. Naturally, I consult the organisations on how to respond to the subsequent versions of the opinion.

The afternoon will be dedicated to the theme “No more double standard in foodstuff – Same brand, same product, same quality” with a presentation by Mrs. Daciana Octavia SÂRBU, Vice-Chair of the ENVI Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, member of the European Parliament. BEUC representatives involved in this topic will also attend the meeting.

In short, this approach has many benefits, both for my constituency of nature and environment organisations as well as for the EESC and me personally.