



European Economic and Social Committee

Europe III

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The Voice of Group III

Various Interests

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Editorial

Jillian Van TURNHOUT
Vice-President of the EESC with responsibility for Communication Policy, Member of Group III, Chief Executive Children's Rights Alliance (Ireland)

"Europe: nifty at 50?"

This year we mark the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. The celebration logo declares Together Since 1957. This logo for me expresses so well in a simple way what was originally conceived by the idea of Europe: not only politics, or the Euro, or geographic boundaries, but most of all co-operation and solidarity.

Just like Odysseus on his quest to return home, Europe is on a search for its own identity. According to many, Europe is suffering a mid-life crisis. People everywhere are asking whether the Union is still fit at 50? Does it need a bit of anti-wrinkle treatment or plastic surgery? Or is the best yet to come? Like the famous Beatles' song, Europe might ask, 'Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm 64!'

I had the honour to represent the EESC at the Youth Summit in Rome and I would encourage my friends and colleagues to seek out the Rome Youth Declaration. In contrast to the Berlin Declaration the young people of Europe have clearly sign posted the areas that need our attention; Sustainable development; Youth and education; The EU's role in a globalised world; the social and economic Model of the EU; and Building democracy and civil society in Europe.

But of course, as we all know, Rome wasn't built in a day. The Summit should not be seen as a conclusion, but rather as a fresh impetus in the process that allows for a constructive, effective and continuous contribution to the future of Europe.

This Committee, which will celebrate its own 50th anniversary in 2008, serves as a bridge between Europe and civil society, representing and voicing the concerns of "the various economic and social components of organised civil society". The achievements of Europe are certainly worth celebrating, but this is not just about the past. It is a unique opportunity to better understand the present and to look towards the future.

work programme for your tenure as President? What do you hope to achieve over the coming two years?

Two major dossiers are on the table. The first concerns international negotiations. In my capacity as president of COPA, I will make every effort to ensure that the European agricultural model is not sacrificed to the interests of the big agricultural export companies around the world and the hegemonic agenda of a few. The second dossier concerns the future of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013. The outcome of the former will largely decide opportunities for the latter. I shall try to ensure that the CAP debate is not reduced exclusively to budgetary considerations. The CAP deserves better. Indeed, European agriculture must contribute fully to the new challenges facing Europe, i.e. competitiveness, sustainable development, and combating climate change. The CAP is undoubtedly a useful tool, but it also affects men and women: producers and consumers. This cannot be sufficiently emphasised.

Europe III – What message would you like to send to Commissioner Mandelson, to take with him as he prepares to represent European agricultural interests at the upcoming round of the WTO negotiations?

Mr Mandelson, Commissioner for Trade, has been mandated by the Member States to defend European interests during negotiations. He must take a balanced approach to doing so and should not use European agriculture as a bargaining chip. We believe that the Commission came close to stretching the limits of its mandate with the last conditional offer in October 2005. Taken one step further, European agriculture would have plummeted into a financial abyss, estimated by the Commission at EUR 37 billion. I would also like to remind Mr Mandelson that the Doha Development Round cannot be reduced to opening the markets of the EU and developing countries ever further. At present, the latter are the major losers in this round, which is supposed to concern them. Opening markets at any cost is not a creed, it is a cop-out.

Europe III – Being a French national, you are more than aware of the scepticism, pessimism and even mistrust felt by French and other European farmers following the negative effects of the last round of CAP reforms in 2003. How can you, and your partner organisation COGECA, reassure farmers and convince them to trust that the Commission and European decision-makers will not use the 2008 "Health Check" as a means to introduce further unpopular cut-backs, more bureaucratic administrative procedures and funding reforms; that the "Health Check" will only be an assessment tool; a 'photograph' of the current situation; a simple stocktaking exercise?

The CAP was reformed in 2003, and 2007 is the second year of this reform's application throughout the European Union. It is impossible to have effective public policy if we

constantly change course or tack. I would also emphasise the approach of Ms Fischer-Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, who wishes to provide farmers with a stable policy framework. COPA and COGECA therefore believe that the 2003 CAP reform should apply until 2013, i.e. the end of the current financial perspectives. I will ensure that COPA is represented at all Commission and Council debates to defend the interests of farmers and ensure that policy makers respect their commitments. We must scrupulously safeguard the interests of European farmers, obviously with the public interest in mind.

Europe III – The EESC just adopted an opinion on "Animal Welfare – Improving by Labelling?" (EESC opinion: 421/2007) and held a hearing on the subject at the EESC on 28 March 2007. How do you see the debate on this issue developing in the future? As a keeper of farm animals yourself, do you consider that better animal welfare conditions will result in more costs for farmers, or will the consumer have to pay?

This subject is as important to citizens as it is to European farmers since they are concerned about animal welfare. I am also aware of consumers' genuine desire to be better informed. At present, consumers are under-informed. The Commission should do more to raise awareness of the fact that European farmers comply with agricultural regulations that are among the most stringent in the world. This should make it easier for consumers to identify European produce. The real challenge for livestock farmers is that if protection is lowered at the borders, applying these measures would place European farmers at a serious competitive disadvantage. So before considering animal welfare labelling, we need to include these issues in international negotiations and educate consumers into paying the price for these products. I would like to ask a question that is neither technical nor political: "Does anyone think that livestock farmers neither like nor respect their animals?"

Europe III – Group III consists of a number of members who represent consumers' interests across the EU, in relation to such issues as, labelling and packaging of produce, traceability of origin and general food-safety issues. The Consumers and Environment and Farmers Categories of the EESC held a recent joint meeting on the theme "From Farm to Fork", where COPA was represented by Ms Roxane Feller. How do you see COPA's relationship with these consumer organisations? What sort of dialogue exists at European level between farming and consumer groups on issues of common interest, such as, the "From Farm to Fork" concept?

The consumer is the last link in the food chain – the most important link and the one for which no effort is spared in ensuring that we produce safe foods by applying a body of European regulations. This is why COPA is in regular contact, at European level, with European consumer

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Interview of the month

The new President of COPA sets out his stall



"On 19 April 2007, the Praesidium of the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations in the EU (COPA) unanimously elected Mr Jean-Michel LEMETAYER as their new President, with a two-year mandate from 2007-2009. Since 2001, he has been President of the French National Federation of Agricultural Unions and we asked him for his views on some of the big issues facing the European agriculture sector today."

Europe III – Now that you are getting your feet under the desk as the new President of COPA, what are the main priorities of your

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The new President of COPA sets out his stall

organisations in order to maintain a permanent dialogue with organisations like BEUC and Euro Coop, during which we not only listen to their expectations but also inform them of issues affecting the farming sector in Europe. One example I could give is a platform we have set up with our partners in the food sector - including consumers - to discuss and reach joint decisions about the safety of products derived from animals vaccinated during disease outbreaks. There are any number of examples: pesticides, GMOs, research and public health. We intend to pursue and strengthen this dialogue in the coming months.

Europe III – As a dairy farmer, you have first-hand experience in animal husbandry/management and dairy production. “EU Milk quotas to dairy farmers are due to cease in 2015. To avoid the financial tap being turned off quite brutally, do you think that the European Commission should introduce a phased out reduction over the next 7 years? What effect will the cessation of milk quotas have on the dairy industry?”

The dairy quota system will come to an end in 2015. We know that the Commission does not intend to recommend extending it due to a deadlock on this issue within the Agriculture Council. COPA-COGECA has been holding internal discussions on the future of European dairy policy, which should be concluded by the end of the year. Dairy quotas are part of a sectoral policy and we hope to hold in-depth dialogue about them with the Commission and the stakeholders in this sector. Quotas cannot be dissociated from a broader debate, i.e. the future of EU dairy policy and the international context. Questions relating to industrial policy, regional balance and agricultural start-up policy should also be taken into consideration.

Europe III – “Climate-change” is the buzz-word in political circles these days. Given the potentially catastrophic effects that global warming and climate change could have on the European continent, particular on southern countries, what studies are you conducting or strategies do you plan to implement to prepare the agricultural sector for this eventuality?

Climate change presents risks for farming activities but also opportunities. The risks are obvious since farming essentially relies on natural resources and the weather. Farmers did not wait for this debate to start before developing their own practices and becoming natural resource managers (water, soil, air) in the true sense. Member organisations help farmers to apply best practices. Another risk, although not frequently discussed, is the emergence of new diseases. The European Union must face this challenge head on. Finally, regarding

opportunities, agriculture, is the sector that contributes most to EU objectives for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (-16% between 1990 and 2010) thanks to improved feeding techniques and slurry management. The development of biofuels could also eventually open up prospects for additional income for producers.

Europe III – What impact has enlargement had on your organisation and its members? 12 new member States in two years: is there a fair distribution of EU support for farming communities in the poorer rural areas of, for example Romania and Bulgaria? If not, what should be done about it?

Today, COPA represents 59 organisations from 25 Member States. We have also drawn up a cooperation protocol with the Bulgarian agricultural organisations and are in touch with several Romanian agricultural organisations. Our members have more than doubled in number. Although they have been contributing to our meetings since 2002, working together remains a long, mutually instructive journey. We aspire to create a broad coalition of those who work the land. From east to west, we do not share the same working conditions (at present) but we do share the same job. The factors that unite us are more powerful than those that divide us. At present, over 30% of expenditure associated with the first and second pillars of the CAP, and 70% of the funds under Objective 1 go to these Member States. Nevertheless, the budget cannot provide the answer to all the challenges; their farming sectors must meet their consumers' needs and, given their grain production, the development of biofuel production could also present a new opportunity.

Europe III – 50 years ago, the ideal of European co-operation and integration grew out of war, conflict, strife and hunger and the stable supply food and energy were at the heart of the foundation of the EU. What role do you envisage for the agricultural sector in the future development of the European project and are you optimistic that young people, meaning specifically, young farmers, will be confident enough to remain in the industry and will view farming as a sustainable and long-term profession and a viable source of income for them and their families?

European farmers should be proud of their contribution to European integration. European citizens should be better informed of the advantages they gain under this policy. Farming and the Common Agricultural Policy remain key to the European Union's ability to face the challenges of the Twenty-First Century including competitiveness, the production of healthy foodstuffs, sustainable development and energy sufficiency. When I observe agricultural developments in other parts of the world, I am convinced that our European agricultural model has a long future. This future will be achieved through a strong Europe with a shared destiny.

and platforms but also establish permanent contact with Civil Society Liaison Group and TEN Section.

A presentation of the CIRIEC study entitled “Social Economy in Europe” by Professors Jose Luis Monzon and Rafael Chaves was made, followed by an exchange of views with members. A final discussion on the study and the organisation of a study launch event will be held during the next extraordinary Category meeting on 13th June.

More information on the categories' work can be found on our website, by contacting the Secretariat of Group III, or the spokespersons of the categories.

News from Group III Agreed European Organisations



Rome Youth Declaration

Young Europeans send a strong message to EU leaders from the very first ever EU Youth Summit:

“Listen to what we have to say, ask us what we need and then act!”

Following a series of national debates in all EU countries, on 23-25 March 2007, under the motto “Your Europe – your future”, more than 200 young Europeans came together in Rome from a meeting to debate the future direction of Europe and to send a message to its leaders. The Youth Summit, organised jointly by the EU and the European Youth Forum, was addressed by, amongst others, Mrs Margot Wallstrom, Vice-president of the European Commission with responsibility for Communication Policy and Mr Jan Figel, Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth. Six main themes were addressed and discussed by the participants in Rome and many others, who took part via a live webcast: the future of the EU treaty; the EU's social and economic model; sustainable development; the EU's role in a globalised society; democracy and civil society and youth and education.

Another message delivered to European leaders in the conclusions was:

“The stakeholders at all levels, governments and EU institutions must include youth organisations and young people coming from diverse backgrounds in all youth-related decision-making processes”.

The full text of the conclusions of the Rome Youth Summit is available on the European Youth Forum website www.youthforum.org

Further information is also available on the Commission's European Youth Portal website: http://europa.eu/youth/index.cfm?!_id=en



COPA and COGECA demand a level playing field at the WTO.

“No further concessions in the WTO - commitments to European farmers and their co-operatives”

At a meeting on 12 April with a close advisor of German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, the Presidents of COPA & COGECA urged the German Presidency to ensure a fair and balanced outcome in the WTO negotiations. They stated that: “the EU has already put forward a very substantial offer which will cause considerable losses for European Agriculture. Yet, we see no equivalent moves from our trading partners.”

The full text of this press release CDP(07)17-1 of 13 April 2007 is available on COPA-COGECA's website:

http://www.copa-cogeca.be/pdf/pr_07_19f_1e.pdf



Euro Coop has informed us that they have moved.

From 18, April 2007 their new address will be:

Euro Coop
Av. de Tervueren 12, bte 3
B-1040 Bruxelles
Tel. + 32 2 285 00 70 - Fax. + 32 2 231 07 57

EURO COOP, one of the fourteen agreed organisations of Group III, is the European Association of Consumer Cooperatives. Their primary objectives include representing to the EU institutions the interests of consumer cooperatives and their 22 million consumer-members across 17 European countries. For more information, visit their web-site: <http://www.eurocoop.coop/>



Other news that matters

The Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) during its second meeting held on 27th April 2007 presented the revised work programme for 2007-2010. In 2007 SDO will draw up two own-initiative opinions, on “Climate change and the Lisbon Strategy” (NAT/363) and on “The role of the National Councils for Sustainable Development” (NAT/362), Rapporteur **Mr Roman HAKEN GR-III-CZ**, which is due to be adopted by EESC Plenary Session in December 2007. The exploratory opinion on the “Biannual Progress Report of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy”, Rapporteur **Mr Lutz RIBBE, GR-III-DE** (NAT/348) should be presented in July 2007.

The SDO 2007 work programme also included a Public Hearing “Civil Society responding to Climate Change” held at EESC on 16th May 2007, where main different actors in the Climate Change field were invited to discuss about the subject. The current Chair of the SDO is Mr Derek OSBORNE, Group III member (UK).

The Bureau of Group III, which is made up of 27 members, one per Member State, will hold an extraordinary meeting in Lisbon on 2 July 2007 in collaboration with the Portuguese Consumer Protection Association (DECO). The main theme for discussion will be: “Organisation, representation, and functioning of NGOs in a democratic society” and a wide cross-section of Portuguese civil society organisations will be invited to attend. Group III has, for some years past, operated a policy of holding an extraordinary meeting of its Bureau in the country holding the

presidency of the Council. Such extraordinary Bureau meetings provide an opportunity to get to meet and listen to the views and concerns of well-informed and clued-in local grassroots organisations in the various EU Member States. It is also an occasion for Group III to engage in a dialogue with representatives of farmers' organisations, consumer protection associations, the voluntary sector, SMEs, the professions, and those who are involved with environmental issues, persons with disabilities, family, women, youth etc. and hear first-hand their experiences and points of view on topical issues of mutual interest. Within the EESC, we in Group III represent organised civil society both at European level and, through our respective organisations at local level, continue to promote and encourage direct dialogue with the citizens of Europe, acting as we do as a bridge between Europe, its Institutions and civil society. Therefore, through this form of dialogue, we benefit greatly and gain a broader understanding of key issues, which have both a local and European dimension.

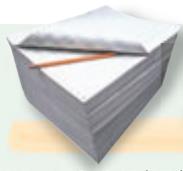


Our Group's Strength

The Social Economy Category held its meeting on 26th March. Category's members discussed and approved their work programme for the next years. Some concrete proposals highlighted during the debate were: include contacts and invitation to Commission official in charge of ESF programming in new Member States for next meeting; need to take a proactive approach to the European Statutes (foundations, associations and mutualities), through a EESC opinion; need to cooperate more closely with national organisations



The Secretariat of Group III has bid a sad farewell to our Romanian stagiaire, Coralia Catana, who spent the last seven months working with us. Her specific project was the image and visibility of the Group and in this regard she is largely responsible for the reworking and new-look newsletter, the Group brochure and the Group stand. Thanks Coralia and good luck with your future career...



Highlights of APRIL 2007 EESC Plenary Session Group III members coordinating the work on opinions

Mr István GARAI (HU) will chair the study group of the opinion on: EU Consumer Policy strategy 2007-2013 (INT/357).

The other Group III members of this study group are: Mrs Bénédicte FEDERSPIEL (DK), Mr Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) and Mr Dick WESTENDORP (NL).

Mr Gerd WOLF (DE) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: European Research Area: New Perspectives (INT/358).

The other Group III members of this study group are: Mr Vladimír BÁLEŠ (SK), Mr Hanns-Eberhard SCHLEYER (DE), Mrs Pirkko RAUNEMAA (FI), Mr Zenonas Rokas RUDZIKAS (LT) and Mr Stylianos STAIKOS (EL).

Mr Hubert GHIGONIS (FR) will chair the study group of the exploratory opinion on: Bottlenecks in transport (TEN/296).

The other Group III members of this study group are: Mr Frank ALLEN (IE), Mrs Gunta ANČA (LV), Mr Roberto CONFALONIERI (IT) and Mr Lutz RIBBE (DE).

Mr Krzysztof KAMIENIECKI (PL), Mr Nikolaos LIOLIOS (EL), Mr Staffan NILSSON (SE) Mr Frederic OSBORN

(UK), Mr Corrado ROSSITTO (IT) and Mr Gerd WOLF (DE) are members of the study group for the exploratory opinion on: Energy mix in transport (TEN/297).

Mr Hervé COUPEAU (FR) is the Rapporteur, working alone, for the opinion on: Community procedures for the establishment of residue limits of pharmacologically active substances in foodstuffs of animal origin (NAT/361).

Mr Gabriel SARRÓ IPARRAGUIRRE (ES) is the Rapporteur, working alone, for the opinion on: Community framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the Common Fisheries Policy (NAT/364).

Mr Lutz RIBBE is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: Market-based instruments for environment and related policy purposes (NAT/253).

The other Group III members of this study group are: Mr Pedro Mauricio BARATO TRIGUERO (ES), Mr Hans KLETZMAYR (AT) and Mrs Ludmilla TODOROVA (BG).

Mr Yves SOMVILLE (BE) will chair the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: Climate change and the Lisbon Strategy (NAT/SDO/362).

The other Group III members of this study group are: Mr Krzysztof KAMIENIECKI (PL), Mrs Pirkko RAUNEMAA (FI) and Mr Javier SÁNCHEZ ANSÓ (ES).

Mr Roman HAKEN (CZ) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: The role of the National Councils for Sustainable Development (NAT/SDO/363).

Mr Krzysztof PATER (PL) will chair the study group on: Tax arrangements for gas oil used as motor fuel for commercial purposes and the coordination of taxation of unleaded petrol and gas oil used as motor fuel (ECO).

The other members of the study group are: Mr Ludvík JÍROVEC (CZ), Mr Radu NICOSEVICI (RO) and Mr János TÓTH (HU).

Mr Eugen LUCAN (RO) is a member of the drafting groups on: Quarterly statistics on Community job vacancies; Common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS) by reason of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union (ECO) and Community statistics on public health and health and safety at work (SOC).

An Insight Into Group III Leadership



Group III 'goes local' and promotes dialogue with civil society organisations in Germany



from the left: Mr Peter HEESEN, President of the dbb, Mr Staffan NILSSON, President of Group III and Mr Frank STÖHR member of Group III.

On 30 March 2007 Group III held an extraordinary Bureau meeting in Berlin co-hosted by the German Civil Service Federation (dbb Beamtenbund und tarifunion), whose President Mr Peter HEESEN opened the meeting with a welcoming address and a presentation of his organisations work and profile.

The keynote speech was given by a chief advisor to the German Chancellor, Dr. Uwe CORSEPIUS, Director of European Affairs at the Federal Chancery, where he gave a debriefing on the Berlin Declaration – *The Declaration on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome* – and an overview of the main priorities of the German Presidency during the first half of 2007.

A number of discussion panels were held, the first being on "A social Europe in a globalized world" with contributions from Dr Bernd SCHLÜTER, a representative of Diakonie EKD, Mr Peter CLEVER, of the Confederation German Employers' Associations and Group III members Mr Arno METZLER and Mr Frank STÖHR. The European Commission representative in Germany, H. E. Dr. Gerhard SABATHILL, spoke on the topic "Does Europe focus too much on competition and forget its social dimension?"

The final round table panel discussion with the invited organisations and their representatives was on "The role of civil society in communicating Europe and the way forward for the Constitution" where Mr Henri MALOSSE, President of Gr I, who has been EESC Rapporteur for previous opinions on this subject, presented an interesting overview of the position of the EESC and the role that civil society organisations should play in representing the voice of the citizens of Europe in the current debate on the future of the European Union.

member states that joined 2004 and 2007. As well it is important to remain at the understanding on the rights of people with disabilities to be entitled to high quality services what are designed based on the needs of the group – market forces should not be forcing the development in the wrong direction. A very important impact of the seminar was the exchange of know-how, as very many innovative approaches were presented, which could be implemented more widely across the EU. The seminar had 107 participants 4 of who were members of the EESC.

Editor's note: The conclusions of the seminar were made by Mr Meelis JOOST, Rapporteur of the recent exploratory opinion "Opinion on Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities", at the request of the Austrian presidency (EESC opinion 91/2007) adopted at the January 2007 plenary with 151 votes, one vote against and with one abstention. He is also currently Rapporteur for the exploratory opinion on "Harmonisation of disability indicators as a means of monitoring European policy" (SOC/270), at the request of the forthcoming Portuguese presidency. This opinion will seek to focus on identifying indicators that can be used for measuring improvement of the provision of equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the Member States and is due for adoption at the May 2007 plenary session of the EESC.



Group III Members In The Spotlight Playing a Key Role



Mr Roberto CONFALONIERI, President of the Follow-up Committee "Euromed" and member of Group III, represented the EESC in the plenary session meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) held in Tunis on 16-17 March 2007. During this meeting

EESC granted the status of permanent observer with the rights to speak and have representation in committees. "This event is an important achievement never happened before in the history", Mr Confalonieri said, bearing witness to the success of the EUROMED partnership process.

The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA), established in 2003, is the most recent institution of the Barcelona Process and it plays a consultative role. It provides parliamentary input and support for the consolidation and development of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The EMPA consists of parliamentarians appointed by the EU Member States, by the ten Mediterranean partners (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey) and by the European Parliament.

Further information is available on the EUROMED café website:

www.euromedcafe.org/newsdetail.asp?lang=ing&documentID=3924



Mr Nielsen – report of the "Animal Welfare" Conference on 28 March 2008

Mr Leif NIELSEN, a Senior Consultant at the Danish Farmers' Association and member of Group III reports on a major conference on: "Animal Welfare – Improving by Labelling?"

which was held at the EESC the 28 March 2007.

"Animal welfare is of concern to many European citizens and labelling can and should help. We must recognise its relevance to consumer choice when buying products of animal origin. Initiatives at European level in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the Internal Market is therefore necessary.

These were the main conclusions of a conference held on 28 March in the EESC premises with 250 participants, in cooperation with the German Presidency of the Council and the EU Commission.

Alexander Graf von Schwerin, EESC Vice-President, underlined that the EU public is increasingly alive to animal welfare concerns and that the EESC, as representative of organised civil society, clearly has a responsibility to promote reflections and initiatives in this field, including the promotion of animal welfare issues outside the EU in order to avoid undermining the European system by imports from non-member countries where standards might be lower.

The conference recommended that account should be taken of the recommendations made by the EESC in its exploratory opinion "Animal Welfare – Labelling", requested by the German presidency and adopted on 15 March 2007 (EESC opinion 421/2007). This was welcomed both by Mr Horst Seehofer, German Federal Minister of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, and EU Commissioner Mr Markos Kyprianou, as well as by Mr Thijs Berman, Member of the European Parliament, who chaired a working session looking at the current situation.

According to this a European framework for voluntary labelling must be based on the market forces and a voluntary offer to the producers, business and industry. It should be as easy for the consumers to know and to use. It has to be based on sound scientific evidence and it should avoid unnecessary administrative burden on producers and national authorities. The use of well-established independent, privately organised audit and certification schemes should be considered. It is also important that such labelling should not lead to the deterioration of the functioning of existing labelling schemes targeting animal welfare standards above statutory requirements.

In this way the voluntary animal welfare indications based on a European framework would better ensure the transparency and visibility of existing schemes, helping to secure their economic viability.

The conference, which enabled a broad discussion between the operators in the food chain, consumer and animal welfare associations and representatives of the scientific community and authorities, concluded that labelling under these conditions could improve animal welfare. The existing and well-known labelling systems, e.g. for the labelling of eggs and organic farming methods were also presented at the conference and their pros and cons were discussed.

Horst Seehofer emphasised that "Our aim is to improve animal welfare and to establish a labelling system that is easy to understand for consumers. This must happen at a voluntary level and without creating new bureaucratic burdens."

Markos Kyprianou, who closed the conference, also supported the development of a suitable system. "We have a mandate now and we will analyse the arguments which have been presented today and draw up proposals."

Editor's note: Mr Leif NIELSEN was Rapporteur for the recent opinion on "Animal Welfare – Labelling" (EESC opinion 421/2007), which was adopted by 92 votes to six, with two abstentions at the EESC's plenary session held on 14 and 15 March 2007.



Mr Joost – report form "Equal Opportunities Conference" on 17 April 2007

Mr Meelis JOOST, a representative of the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People (EPI Koja) and a member of Group III sent us the following report

of the European Seminar on Social Economy and Equal Opportunities:

"On April 17th Seminar on Social Economy and Equal Opportunities took place at the EESC headquarters. The seminar was organised by the CEP-CMAF (European Conference of Cooperatives, Mutualities, Foundations and Associations) and the European Disability Forum (EDF), with the support of the EESC Social Economy Category, coinciding with the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All 2007. The seminar explored the current and potential role of Social Economy in the areas of non-discrimination and equal opportunities, with a particular focus on disability, and to review EU policies, programmes and funds in these fields, and in particular in the framework of the European Year 2007.

The seminar was opened by **Mr Staffan NILSSON**, President of Group III, who highlighted the importance of initiatives organised in co-operation with the European organisations. Firstly the statements of organising bodies by President Jean Claude Dettileux of CEP-CMAF and Mr Yanis Vardakastanis of EDF were made on achieving equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The introductory panel was chaired by EESC Group III member, **Mr Miguel Angel CABRA DE LUNA**, spokesperson for the Social-Economy Category of the EESC. The European Year of Equal opportunities for all and the fact that the UN Convention of Rights for People with Disabilities was signed on March 30th in New York, there are many expectations for further political development on EU level.

EU policies and instruments to achieve equal opportunities: EU anti-discrimination framework and the European Year 2007 was the first working session, during which the initiatives what benefit the social-economy and equal opportunities for people with disabilities were discussed from the EU policy point of view. EP Rapporteur Ms Liz Lynne described the findings of her report for the European Parliament, highlighting several aspects where considerable progress in needed, like not sufficient progress in implementation of non-discrimination of the field of employment, difficulties in comprehending the concept of reasonable accommodation (meaning workplace adaptation and accessibility), lack of community based alternatives to institutions.

The last working session before lunch was called Equal opportunities for people with disabilities: a reality or an utopia, chaired by **Ms Gunta ANČA**, President of the Latvian Umbrella Body For Disability Organisations (SUSTENTO) and member of Group III. Having an intriguing heading – during the statements and discussion it became clear that the situation is landing somewhere in-between. There has in recent years been many positive developments improving the rights of people with disabilities, in the field of transportation, recently the UN convention just to mention some. Meanwhile the implementation of legislation and positive action measures to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities must become much better.

The seminar was a very important initiative, which EESC was supporting. Focusing on equal opportunities for people with disabilities is an extremely important task in the frames of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for all. The seminar identified that a lot more information and understanding on the concept of social-economy is needed, particularly in the



Highlights of our Members' Work

At its plenary session on 25-26 April the EESC adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs.



Mr Nilsson
"Soil protection" NAT/302
(EESC opinion: 603/07)

The EESC welcomes the EU-level thematic strategy for soil protection and endorses, in principle, the establishment of a framework directive and points out that the strategy must focus on areas where the problem is the most serious and where the threat to arable land is greatest, e.g. change of soil use (where arable land is taken over for building, roads, etc.), polluted industrial areas and sealing of ground surfaces. The EU strategy must respect the subsidiarity principle. The costs of soil degradation must be borne by those who are responsible for the damage in cases where this is proportionate, rather than primarily by the land user. If the reason for using a framework directive is to ensure common ground, the Member States must have similar levels of ambition, in order to avoid any distortion of competition.

The opinion underlines that good agricultural and forestry practices maintain and improve the soil. By definition, when farmland is used for food production, natural land has been taken for cultivation purposes. Consequently, some impact is unavoidable. *It condemns the Commission's failure thus far to present its redrafted proposal for a new revised sludge directive and calls on the Commission to present it without delay, as it is one of the mainstays in soil protection for agricultural land and for ensuring that contamination by dangerous substances does not increase.*

In conclusion, the opinion points out that national sectoral policy must not lead to distortions of competition between the Member States and states that the EESC believes that the establishment of an independent committee of experts from the private and public sector, would facilitate implementation of the soil strategy.



Mr Ribbe
"Transport in urban and metropolitan areas" TEN/276
(EESC opinion: 615/07)

The EESC is very concerned to note the sharp decline in the share of local public transport (LPT) in total urban transport volume, which is growing fast; this decline is not confined to EU-15 but is also proceeding at an especially rapid pace in the new Member States. Traffic flows, from cars in particular, are placing an increasing burden on cities, causing a large number of mostly unresolved problems; concerted action by the Commission, the Member States and local authorities is therefore needed to reverse this trend.

The EESC asks the Commission to submit an appropriate package of political measures setting out clear guidelines and programmes promoting the achievement of the requisite objectives, as part of its planned Green Paper on urban transport. The

Member States should be aware of their obligation to contribute financially to the social services which they require transport enterprises to provide (such as lower fares for school children, pensioners, persons with disabilities, etc.), and to support local authorities in their investment projects. Municipalities should draw up transport plans for sustainable urban transport, in accordance with minimum European requirements, which have not yet been established. If they fail to draw up such plans, they should be barred from receiving support from Community funds.

Also with a view to meeting EU target values and complying with EU rules on inner-urban air quality and reducing fine-particle and noise pollution, it is essential to give priority to the development of an attractive public transport system incorporating information systems and offers based on new technology (such as mobile phone ticketing, dial-a-bus and dial-a-taxi services) and mobility advisory and marketing services. There is an urgent need for strengthening of the environmental alliance (e.g. bus, train and bike) and for closer synchronisation of timetables.

In conclusion, the opinion recommends that the Commission, the Council, and in particular the Committee of the Regions investigate the reasons why some cities have succeeded in progressing towards sustainable urban transport, whereas in others the situation continues to deteriorate.



Mr Sarró Iparraguirre
"Sustainability in EU Fisheries" NAT/333
(EESC opinion: 605/07)

Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) is the highest yield that may be taken from a fish stock

without lowering its productive potential for future years. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, the EU Member States committed themselves to maintaining or restoring fish stocks to levels that can produce at MSY no later than 2015. The Communication outlines the steps by which the Commission proposes implementing an MSY approach, the benefits this will bring once stocks have been restored to this level, and the options for managing the 'transitional' period for stocks which are currently over-fished.

Adopting an MSY approach will set a new political orientation for fisheries management in the European Union and will bring real benefits to fishing communities. The alternative is further decline and further losses. To this end, the Commission intends to propose a series of long-term plans with the aim of bringing all major fish stocks in EU waters to rates of fishing at which maximum sustainable yields can be achieved. For stocks jointly managed with third countries, the Union will seek to develop joint management arrangements with the same objective. The plans will be fishery-based, addressing groups of fish stocks that are caught together.

In conclusion, the opinion fully supports basing fisheries management policy on the principle of the maximum sustainable yield, but recommends that, in its long-term plans, the Commission should set reasonable, gradual and flexible annual adjustments.



Mrs O'Neill
"Guidelines for employment policies" SOC/264
(EESC opinion: 608/07)

The EESC supports the proposal that the Employment Guidelines 2005-2007 be maintained for 2007 bearing in mind the highlighted areas of concern and recommendations and strongly recommends that the timetable and process to be adopted is widely and circulated in good time to the range of stakeholders in order to maximise the benefit from this process, to build on good will and to ensure the maximum participation by stakeholders and to allow sufficient time for responses at EU and national level at the development stage.

There is stronger emphasis on the inclusion of people with special needs into the new Employment Guidelines with specific targets and greater recognition of social policy requirements. *The EESC stresses the importance of the involvement of social partners and civil society at the earliest possible time in the development of the guidelines by the Commission as well as being consulted on the final document. The Commission is urged to take steps immediately to engage with the EESC on the development of the Employment Guidelines by establishing formal and informal contacts in order to take a proactive approach to the development of the Employment Guidelines for the next three years.*

Much more ambitious, measurable targets which can be benchmarked in the new guidelines at EU and member state level, and more enforcement powers for the Commission are called for. The appropriate ICT systems are available in all member states to ensure an improvement in the collection of data and to facilitate monitoring and evaluation by both member states and the Commission.

In conclusion the opinion continues to recommend that National Reform Programmes must include more concrete evidence of defined objectives, timescales, cost and budget provision.



Mr Osborn
"Safe storage of mercury" NAT/344
(EESC opinion: 607/07)

In this opinion, the EESC supports the European Union's active engagement with international efforts to restrict the production and use of mercury throughout the world and to ensure safe methods of storage and disposal. Towards this end, it is important that Europe sets a good example in its own handling of the mercury problem within the Union, and to support better control measures throughout the world.

The Committee therefore supports the general objective of the specific Commission proposal in the current proposed Regulation to ban the export of mercury from Europe and to require the safe storage of surplus mercury within Europe. Banning the export of metallic mercury from Europe and requiring that it be safely stored pending disposal is particularly relevant and timely in current circumstances as the mercury based chlor-alkali process is now being phased out in Europe.

Looking ahead, the Committee urges the Commission to implement the other elements of its mercury

strategy as soon as possible, and to develop measures to further reduce the use of mercury in processes and products within Europe, and to ensure that mercury in waste streams is disposed of safely.

The opinion suggests that the legal ban should come into effect at as early a date as is reasonably possible, and that until that time the Commission and the firms concerned should be encouraged to do whatever they can to reduce exports to a minimum. Furthermore, the Committee supports the storage arrangements proposed by the Commission in this Regulation as being the best available for the present.



Mr Garai
"Report on competition policy 2005" INT/323
(EESC opinion: 602/07)

The opinion recognises that the free market does not always lead to the best result possible.

Distortions in competition hit employees and consumers as well as businesses and the economy in general. Competition policy and competition law is a tool for governments to set and enforce fair market conduct by means of substantive and procedural rules of administrative law.

The EESC is of the view that "competition" should be perceived in a much broader sense and that, especially in the case of consumers, workers and small and medium enterprises, long-term interests could diverge considerably from the immediate interests of ensuring conditions which are conducive to "perfect" competition. The 2005 Report makes it clear that DG COMP is well aware of all the important aspects of economic competition within and outside the EU and of its role in ensuring the legal protection thereof. This is all the more so because EU substantive case-law can also be applied by national competition authorities and courts.

In its opinion, the EESC has chosen to discuss a number of cases described on the Report on Competition Policy in relation to application of articles 81 and 82 TEC. The benefits of concentrations include increased efficiency, accelerated product development, lower costs and management-level synergies. However, from the competition policy perspective concentrations can be disadvantageous, given that aggregation of market powers often gives rise to dominance, which in turn is associated with a high risk of abuse. Sometimes mergers can have a negative impact. Hence, when evaluating mergers, it is important to take employment and social policy aspects into account.

In 2005, DG Competition attempted to reach a better understanding of the objectives of State aid in Member States and the rules which apply to its allocation. With a view to improving coordination among stakeholders and directing public funds to sectors where they could be used efficiently, it launched a State Aid Action Plan. The guiding principles of the Plan aim to help shape better practices which Member States can adapt to.

In conclusion the opinion acknowledges that the Commission succeeded in placing the European Competition Network (ECN) on a firm footing, within a relatively short time.

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Editors of this edition: Liam Ó Brádaigh, Enrica Nardello

Editor-in-chief: Marc Beffort

e-mail: gr3@eesc.europa.eu

Secretariat of the Various Interests' Group, European Economic and Social Committee, 99 Rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels

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