



European Economic and Social Committee

Europe III

The Voice of Group III

Various Interests

ToGEThe®
SINCE 1957

JUNE 2007

No. 4



Editorial

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Vice-President of Group III. Head of International Department and Board member, Italian Christian Worker's Associations (Italy)

"Civil society participation to the EU constitutional debate"

The public response in many countries to the current phase of European Union integration is perennially distant and cold. Evidence for this is the speed with which the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, no more than a celebration, has largely disappeared from the radar in most countries.

Negotiations in the months ahead on the revision of the constitutional treaty must not therefore be allowed to take place only behind the closed doors of the new intergovernmental conference. European civil society networks are rightly calling for the IGC to be accompanied by a broad public debate, centring not only on the Union's main policies but also on the original objectives of the European integration process. Direct participation in the European debate by national civil society organisations has long been a serious weak point; and most of the consultation processes to date have involved pro-European umbrella organisations, based in Brussels or nearby. Until there is a real quantum leap in terms of involving civil society organisations at local and national level, the distance and lack of consensus will unfortunately remain.

The EESC can contribute in a real and innovative way. It is already doing a lot; take for instance: the extraordinary meetings of the Group III Bureau in individual EU countries, allowing time for meetings and debate with national civil society organisations; EESC Bureau meetings away from Brussels; the work of the Liaison Group; the debates held during the European Convention and those planned for the near future; growing cooperation with various national economic and social councils; the dozens of events hosted or promoted by the EESC; the everyday work of individual members. We need to build on these achievements and transform them into a more clearly defined process. From the Berlin Declaration in March, to the initiatives planned for 2008 for the EESC's 50th anniversary and the European elections in 2009, there is a need to ensure that this process blends in as part of a single major public debate on the future of Europe, both in terms of the various national events, and of events taking place in Brussels.

It would also be worth considering holding a major event involving European civil society and the main national organisations and networks during the intergovernmental conference, as a possible prelude to series of events along the lines of "European Civil Society Days", to take place simultaneously in the majority of Member States. This would be an increasingly effective and high-profile means of contributing to the objective we share with all the EU institutions: that of bringing Europe to the people and putting them centre stage.



Interview of the month

European Consumers: A voice with clout



Interview with Mr Rasmus KJELDAHL, President of BEUC.

The Consumers and Environment category of the EESC has twenty-three members, all of whom hail from Group III. They represent a wide cross-section of consumer interests throughout Europe and have some questions for the man at the top of the European Consumers' Organisation BEUC.

EUROPE III - Are you satisfied with the influence that BEUC has on EU-developments, laws and directives in the consumer field?

"We are never satisfied - there is always so much more to do, and our resources are very limited. Furthermore BEUC is heavily outnumbered by the more than 15,000 industry lobbyists in Brussels. On the other hand we are pleased that we tend to score highly in opinion surveys among decision-makers - most of them say they would like to see and hear more of us."

EUROPE III - Do you have enough access to the Commissioner and do you appreciate her role in improving the influence of the European consumers?

"Commissioner Kuneva has made a great start in raising the profile of consumer policy and visiting already most of the countries. We were very happy to receive her in our organisation in the beginning of April. And, we are very happy to work with her to put consumer policy at the centre of EU policies across the whole of the Commission - not only SANCO."

EUROPE III - What do you think of the role played by the European Parliament in this process?

"We have mixed views regarding the Parliament. It has often - but by no means always - been the most consumer-friendly of the three main decision-making institutions. Among current issues we would like to see the Parliament do better on obesity, nutritional labelling, and the rights of consumers in relation to intellectual property protection in the digital environment. On the intense marketing of foods with high levels of sugar, salt or fat, especially for children, the Parliament identified the problem clearly, but sadly carefully avoided proposing any practical action to tackle the problem."

EUROPE III - Group III is also composed of members who represent SMEs and farmer's interests and the EESC includes members representing industry and trade organisations' concerns across Europe. How do you see BEUC's relationship with organisations representing these sectors? Are there any differences in the type of approach and dialogue with these sectors?

"BEUC has extensive contacts and interacts continuously with industry, trade, professional and farmers groups, SMEs etc. etc. This is an essential element to understanding the environment in which we work and the issues with which we deal."

EUROPE III - What is your opinion on the growth of the consumer organisations in the EU?

"There has been positive growth in many of the 'old' member states, but the big challenge now is to develop strong consumer movements in the newer member states. Our friends there are making progress, but they face many obstacles, including serious problems of resources and a political and social environment that is not yet fully supportive of civil society, pluralism and public discourse - unfortunately a comment that might also be true in some of the old member states."

EUROPE III - The level of influence that consumer organisations have on their national governments in the different EU-countries varies quite a lot. How do you give support to the smaller organisations?

"By joining BEUC our members gain access to a vast range of information and intelligence about developments at EU level. Sometimes, indeed, our members may know of some developments before their governments do - since the governments may have to wait to be informed through official or institutional means. We also have a range of support services, including training, a bi-lateral mentoring scheme for member associations in new member states, a project to build up testing and publication skills etc."

EUROPE III - What, in your view, are the most important EU-developments in the interest of consumers in 2007 and 2008?

"Apart from the ongoing work with the Consumer Acquis I think that it is the work on combating obesity and diet-related diseases. The question of consumer rights in the digital environment is also crucial. More and more our entertainment, our information, news, education and culture are coming to us in digital form. Consumers have few clear rights vis à vis suppliers and content right holders in this domain. We are trying to deal with a 21st century technology with a 19th century consumer protection regime."

EUROPE III - What is the most crucial need of European consumers where you would like to see some action from the Commission or the Commissioner?

"As stated above we want to see some effective action on obesity and diet-related diseases. And in the other area of equally global importance we need to have a clear set of consumer rights in the digital environment."

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News from Group III's Recognised European Organisations

News from the EEB



On 4 June lawyers, representatives of environmental organisations and EU institutions came together to debate the transposition of the Directive on Environmental Liability. The discussion focused on the tools provided by the Directive to help avoid damage and have the polluter pay in case there is damage and how to make the best use of them.

On 6 June representatives of the EEB, UN/Economic Commission for Europe, member States, the Commission and MEP's got together to examine the progress of the EU and its Member States for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the inter-linkages with the EU Directives on the Convention. The debate concentrated on the next steps to take at national and European level to improve the compliance with the Aarhus Convention setting the principles on "environmental democracy" in terms of access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

The programmes of the two seminars are available on the EEB web-site:

http://www.eeb.org/activities/env_liability/Liability-Seminar-Pgrg-040607.pdf

<http://www.eeb.org/activities/transparency/Agenda-draft-3-010607.pdf> or by e-mail: info@eeb.org

BEUC has a new Director General



Monique Goyens has been designated as the new Director-General of BEUC and will take over from Jim Murray, on his retirement in October 2007. She is currently the Secretary General of the Commission Universitaire pour le Développement in Belgium and she has an extensive background in consumer advocacy. She was a senior legal advisor in BEUC from 1989-1993 and then spent a further three years as Project Leader, European Affairs, at the Centre de Droit de la Consommation at Louvain-la-Neuve, before moving to the Commission Universitaire. She is the author and editor of numerous articles and publications on consumer law and policy.

More BEUC news available on their website: <http://www.beuc.org>



Our Group's Strength

SMEs, Craft Sector and the Professions

The SMEs, Professions and Crafts" Category brings together 12 EESC members from across the EU who act as representatives for the above sectors. Its objective is to discuss all Community legislation or general evolutions that concern the two socio-economic sectors in depth, and to feed the Committee with proposals that allow it to organise its future actions better. Both categories are particularly important to the European economy and society: SMEs are recognised as being the 'backbone' of Europe's economy – they are key generators of growth and jobs and a crucial driving force for innovation. There are around 25 million SMEs in the EU, which account for 99.6% of all businesses. They provide around 75 million jobs throughout the Community, in other words, 2/3 of all employment. It is estimated that SMEs generate more than 60% of the EU's economic output. Their small size makes them more vulnerable than larger businesses to excessive, unnecessary or over-complex legislation. Policy makers are increasingly aware of the need to take account of the specific situation of SMEs in order to ensure the EU achieves its goal of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world.

The professions include more than 6 million highly qualified individuals. This sector creates employment for over 14 million people in the EU. The legal, health, accounting and technical professions are the expression of a fundamental democratic order based on the rule of law, and constitute an essential element of European societies (Resolution P5_TA(2003)0572 of the EP). Professionals in this sector must demonstrate competence, expertise and responsibility, and face the constant challenge of guaranteeing a high quality of service for clients and patients. They often also act in the public interest. The professions are struggling to adapt to an increasingly competitive market whilst, at the same time, maintaining their commitment to lifelong training and the codes of conduct designed to protect and guarantee the rights of the citizen in a democratic state.

The next meeting of this category will be on Friday 13 July 2007.



The current spokesperson for this category is Mrs Christine FAES (BE), who is the Director of UNIZO, International Organisation for the self-employed and SMEs.

News from the Social Economy Category meeting on 13 June 2007

The Social Economy category the largest EESC category, held its second extraordinary meeting of the year last June 13th. The meeting was aimed at discussing and approving an ambitious work plan for the next two years focused on increasing the visibility of Social Economy's role. The newly elected spokesperson, Mr. Cabra de Luna, presented the Social Economy Category Work Programme for the upcoming two years, which was warmly welcomed by attendees. This programme is structured in four working axis, namely internal impact, external visibility, reflexion and discussion and methodology will be implemented through a set of 18 actions. The construction of bridges with other Social Economy stakeholders (European Parliament Intergroup on Social Economy, CEP-CMAF, Civil Society Liaison Group, etc), mainstreaming and giving visibility to Social Economy in the EESC work, improving internal communication and coordination, including Social Economy issues in the upcoming presidencies, are just some of the tasks to be undertaken by the category during this period. One of the category's top-priority activities for the last quarter of 2007 will be a planned high-level seminar on Social Economy at the EESC which, it is intended, could be an occasion to launch the study "The Social Economy in the European Union" and to discuss it with representatives of European Institutions, representatives of member states and Social Economy organisations.

At the June 2007 meeting, Ana Maria Nogueira, from the European Commission's DG Employment, gave a presentation on how the European Social Fund could be used to promote Social Economy. The second guest speaker was Jean Claude Detilleux, President of the European Standing Conference of Cooperatives, Mutualities, Associations and Foundations (CEP-CMAF) - the representative platform of Social Economy in Europe- and President of the French Bank Crédit Coopératif, currently one of the leading banks in Europe. During his intervention, Mr. Detilleux underlined the importance of Social Economy for the achievement of Lisbon's goals as well as the need to respect the specificities of social economy regarding traditional entrepreneurship, as Social Economy is a key factor for social cohesion and development.

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.



Other news that matters

An increased role of the national ESCs in the Lisbon Strategy debate within the EESC

The ad hoc group on the Lisbon Strategy held a recent meeting, which was also attended by representatives from the national Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) of Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Italy, Malta, The Netherlands and Poland. The meeting was addressed by three external guests, Mrs Marion Dewar of the European Commission, Prof. Andre Sapir, Free University of Brussels (ULB) and Mr Joachim Wuermeling, on behalf of the German Presidency. During the meeting the representative of the European Commission welcomed the intention to increase the involvement of the network of national ESCs in the work of the group.

Four thematic groups are currently drawing up opinions on Lisbon-related issues:

– "Business potential – especially of SMEs" (INT/324) - Rapporteur Mrs Christine FAES, member of Group III (BE) and spokesperson of the "SMEs, the Professions and Crafts" category.

– "Investment in knowledge and innovation" (INT/325) - Rapporteur Mr Gerd WOLF, member of Group III (DE)

– "Definition of an energy policy for Europe" (TEN/263) – Rapporteur Mrs Ulla Sirkeinen, Member of Group I (FI)

– "Employment of priority categories" (SOC/251) – Rapporteur Mr Wolfgang GREIF, Member of Group II (AT)

These four opinions are due to be adopted at the July EESC plenary, in the presence of representatives of the national ESCs. The ad hoc Lisbon Group's next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 20th September 2007.

The Group III members of the ad hoc group are: Mr Miklós Barabás, Co-Rapporteur (HU), Mr Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna (ES), Mrs Christine Faes (BE), Mr Staffan Nilsson (SE), Prof. Gerd Wolf (DE) and Mrs Evelyne Pichenot (FR).

Report from the Liaison Group meeting on 31 May 2007

On 31 May the Liaison Group with European Civil Society Originations and Networks held its 13th meeting in the EESC. Since its last meeting the Liaison Groups counts nine additional EESC members and two additional sectors will join the Group, namely protection of children's rights and elderly people. The meeting was chaired by Mrs Jillian van Turnhout (Vice-President of the EESC – Group III) and Mr Jean-Marc Roirant (Secretary General of the French Ligue for Lifelong Learning and Training and President of the European Civil Society Platform for Lifelong Learning).

In his opening speech Mr Roirant underlined that the ambition of the Liaison Group is to spread at national level the ideas and thinking made at European level within the institutions. Three main working areas for the year 2007/2008 were agreed: the Lisbon Strategy, the institutional restart of the creation of Europe and the intercultural dialogue. Three coordinators (issued from the representatives of European organisations and networks) will work on these themes to collect contributions from all the members of the Liaison Group and draw a report in order to feed ideas in the EESC

ongoing works. The Liaison Group also created two internal working groups, composed only of representatives of the European organisations and networks, on mechanisms of dialogue with EU institutions and on civil dialogue and representativity.

The implementation of the programme will take place in close cooperation with the various EESC bodies working on areas that are relevant to the works of the Liaison Group.

The Liaison Group also adopted its modified internal rules laying down, amongst others, the representativity criteria, taken from the 2006 EESC opinion on "The representativeness of European civil society organisations in civil dialogue", that European organisations and networks have to fulfil in order to resent a sector of the European organised civil society within the Liaison Group.

The next meeting will take place on 6 September 2007.

The Sustainable Development Observatory

held its third meeting at the German national parliament (Deutscher Bundestag) in Berlin on 6 June. It hosted an informal hearing on the National Sustainable Development Councils. Speakers were invited from National Councils for Sustainable Development of Germany (Mr Volker Hauff, President), of Portugal (Mr Viriato Soromenho-Marques), of Belgium (Mr Jan De Smedt, Executive secretary) and of Czech Republic (Ms Jaroslava Hlaváčková) to present the experiences, the activities and the advisory work of councils in their countries. The National Sustainable Development Councils are statutory bodies with the mission to advise national and regional governments in the policy fields related to environment and sustainable development and/or to provide a dialogue on sustainable development between stakeholders. The hearing highlighted how Councils' structure and areas of responsibility can vary from country to country and the debate which followed involving the national councils, the members of the Sustainable Development observatory and the observers from the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils network (EEAC) opened the doors for the first time to a direct dialogue and concrete co-operation among all these bodies. The discussion and preparation of the SDO own-initiative opinion on the Role of the National Councils for Sustainable Development, rapporteur Mr Haken (GR III-CZ), will be the step towards achieving this aim and enable EESC to establish further links with other stakeholders in the field of sustainable development and to promote best practices.

The next SDO meeting is scheduled for 4 September 2007.

The Bureau of Group III has been invited by the President of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies to hold a meeting in Bucharest on 11-12 October 2007. The main aim of the meeting will be to emphasise the role of European citizens and non-governmental organisations play at European level and local representatives will present testimony of the fact that Europe belongs to its citizens. The role of Romanian NGOs in the decision-making process and the identifying ways and mechanisms of citizen's consultation and participation will be one of the main issues tackled during the meeting. Group III Member, Mr Cristian Pirvulescu will be co-ordinating the logistics of the meeting.



Highlights of the May 2007 EESC Plenary Session

Group III members co-ordinating the work on opinions

Mr Gerd WOLF (DE) will chair the study group for the opinion on: "European Space Policy" – INT/360. The other Group III members of this study group are: Mr Tomasz CZAJKOWSKI (PL), Mr Corrado ROSSITTO (IT) and Mr Stylianos STAIKOS (EL).

Mrs Reine-Claude MADER-SAUSSAYE (FR) is the Co-Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Retail Financial Services in the Single Market" – INT/361. The other Group III members of this study group are: Mr Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL), Mr Charalambos KOLOKOTRONIS (CY) and Mr Michael SMYTH (UK).

Mr Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL), Mrs Renate HEINISCH (DE) and Mrs Elżbieta Szadzińska will sit on the study group on: "Innovative Medicines Initiative Joint Undertaking/ARTEMIS Joint Undertaking" to implement a Joint Technology Initiative in Embedded Computing Systems" – INT/363/364.

For the INT/365 opinion on: "Aspects of the sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees including analysis of the case for introducing direct producers' liability", the Group III members are: Mr István GARAI (HU), Mrs Benedicte FEDERSPIEL (DK), Mr Radu NICOSEVICI (RO), Mr Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) and Mrs Inger PERSSON (SE).

Mr Hubert GHIGONIS (FR) will chair the study group on: "Trans-European networks: Towards an integrated approach" – TEN/298. The other Group III members of this study group are: Mr Roberto CONFALONIERI (IT) and Mr Lutz RIBBE (DE).

Mr Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALER (ES) will chair the study group for the exploratory opinion on: "Energy efficiency in buildings - contribution of end-users" - TEN/299. The other Group III members of this study group are: Mrs Lavinia ANDREI (RO), Mr Angelo GRASSO (IT), Mr Krzysztof KAMIENIECKI (PL) and Mr Algirdas ŠIUPŠINSKAS (LT).

The Group III members on the study group on: "GALILEO at a cross-road: the implementation of the European GNSS programmes" – TEN/300 are, Mr Roberto CONFALONIERI (IT), Mr Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL) and Mr Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALER (ES).

Mr Hubert GHIGONIS (FR) will chair the study group on: "Review of the Community Strategy to reduce CO2 emissions from passenger cars and light-commercial vehicles" – TEN/301. The other Group III members of this study group are: Mr Zbigniew KOTOWSKI (PL) and Mr Lutz RIBBE (DE).

Mr Frank ALLEN (IE) will be the Rapporteur, working alone, for the opinion on: "Common rules for the international carriage of passengers by coach and bus" – TEN/302.

Mr Roberto CONFALONIERI (IT), Mr Hubert GHIGONIS (FR) and Mr Nikolaos LIOLIOS (EL) will sit on the study group on: "Access to the market in the carriage of goods by road" – TEN/303.

The Group III members on the study group on: "Common rules concerning the conditions to be complied with to pursue the occupation of road

transport operator" – TEN/304 are, Mr Roberto CONFALONIERI (IT), Mr Hubert GHIGONIS (FR) and Mrs Jane MORRICE (UK).

Mr Richard ADAMS (UK) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Better ship dismantling" – NAT/365. The other Group III members of this study group are: Mr Krzysztof KAMIENIECKI (PL) and Mr Kaul NURM (EE).

The CCMi supplementary opinion on: "European space policy" will be chaired by Mr János TÓTH (HU) and the other Group III member is Mr Corrado ROSSITTO (IT).

For the opinion ECO/209 on the "4th report on economic and social cohesion", Mr Miguel CABRA DE LUNA (ES), Mr Ludvík JÍROVEC (CZ), Mr Seppo KALLIO (FI), Mrs Marzena MENDZA-DROZD (PL), Mr Arno METZLER (DE) and Mr Carlos Alberto PEREIRA MARTINS (PT) are the members from Group III.

Mrs Renate HEINISCH (DE) is the Rapporteur for the SOC exploratory opinion on: "Ill-treatment of the Elderly". The other Group III members of this study group are: Mrs Maria Teresa COSTA MACEDO (PT) and Mrs Maureen O'Neill (UK).

Mr Luca JAHIER (IT) is the Rapporteur for the SOC opinion on: "Promoting solidarity between the generations". The other Group III members of this study group are: Mrs Gunta ĀNCA (LV), Mr Lucien BOUIS (FR), Mr Tomasz CZAJKOWSKI (PL) and Mrs Mária HERCZOG (HU).

An Insight Into Group III Leadership



The Bureau of Group III will hold an extraordinary meeting in Lisbon on Monday 2 July 2007. The main objective of the event will be to engage in an open dialogue with Portuguese civil society organisations on themes related to the "Organisation, representation, and functioning of NGOs in a democratic society". The keynote address will be delivered by Prof. Alfredo BRUTO da COSTA, President of National Economic and Social Council of Portugal where he will present: "An overview of the Portuguese NGO model: strengths and weaknesses". Round-table debates will be held on other sub-themes such as the "Legitimation and representativity: the basic principles of civic organisations" and the "Levels of representation and democratic intervention: the stakeholders view of the case for a European statute for NGOs, associations and foundations". The co-chair of the EESC's Liaison Group, Mr Jean Mr Jean-Marc ROIRANT, will moderate a debate on the theme: "Dialogue with political and economic powers: consultation and lobbying". A broad cross-section of civil society organisations from Portugal have been invited to attend.



Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a Key Role

Report from Inger PERSSON (SV) of the 9th. Regional seminar of ACP-EU economic and social interest groups held in Barbados 14-16 May 2007.



As one of the members of the ACP/AVS follow-up committee, I had the opportunity to attend the Regional Seminar in Barbados on 14 to 16 May 2007. The seminar went very well and relations with DG Trade and DG Development were excellent. Among the highlights of the seminar was the public declaration during the press conference by the Secretary-General of the Caribbean Congress of Labour, who stated that "trade unions in the Caribbean region will support the Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU, on the condition that there is greater dialogue with trade unions and with non-state players on the EPA".

The aim of the 3-day seminar in Barbados was to enable NGOs, trade unions and employers to work out a common position and a Final Declaration that could be endorsed by everyone. As representative for consumers and the environment I was invited to the meeting along with consumer and environment representatives from the Caribbean. We came to the conclusion that consumers and the environment had been overlooked in the draft Final Declaration, so we hammered out a text together that we managed to work into the final document over the three days. Moreover, the delegates also called for a "sustainable development" or "environment" chapter to be included in the EPA, in order to reflect the recommendations of the Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) report on "Environment and Tourism in the Caribbean". In particular, the delegates called for measures for the protection of biodiversity, the introduction of new technologies that minimise the impact of tourism on the environment, support for more sustainable land management and the promotion of heritage and eco-tourism. The delegates called for the adoption of better regulation on consumer protection and for the intensification of cooperation on consumer

policy and on the protection of consumers' health. In this context, the activities of the Caribbean Consumer Council should be supported. Whilst the consumer and environmental organisations would have liked to develop the text further in the final document, the Caribbean representatives were pleased with the text that was adopted in the Declaration.

I would conclude that the general impression of the three-day seminar was very positive. Following a lot of discussion, all the delegates were able to agree on a single text. One of the key recommendations was for non-state players from the region to be directly involved in monitoring the implementation of the future EPA, via a Joint EPA Consultative Committee comprising Caribbean and EU non-state players.

Report from Claudio CAPPELLINI (IT) of OECD conference on "Enhancing SME's role in Global Value Chains" held in Tokyo on 31 May and 1 June 2007.



The OECD Working Party on SMEs and entrepreneurship (WPSMEE) at the invitation of the Japanese Authorities (METI), have organised at the end of May in Japan a Global Conference on: "Enhancing the Role of SMEs in Global Value Chains (GVCs)", the aim of which was to further explore this issue, identify examples of best practices in the field of Scientific and Precision instruments Industry, software, tourism and film production/distribution industry and put forward recommendations and proposed initiatives for future action (presentations are available on request from the conference organisers.)

More than 700 participants from business representative organisations, international institutions and OECD Governments Members and non-Members took part to this important event. On this occasion two Swiss Universities (Geneva and Fribourg) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) presented a background study, aimed to enable a better understanding of international value

chains and the ways in which SMEs may benefit from them.

The Conference was officially opened by the Minister of Trade Industry of Japan, Mr. A. Amari, in the presence of Mr. A. Agurria, Mr. A. de Geus, Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD, Mr. A. Gianni Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Economic Development of Italy. The OECD Tokyo Action Statement delivered at the end of the conference for strengthening the role of SMEs in GVCs was built on the outcome of the first OECD conferences held in Bologna from 10-13 June 2000, Istanbul from 3-5 June 2004 and in Athens on 8 November 2006*.

Governments and international institutions could play a significant greater role in assisting SMEs to enter and to rise to the challenges of active participation in GVC through targeted support programmes, policies for a conducive entrepreneurial business environment (e.g. access to market for subcontractors, facilitating SMEs consortia in particular to bid, produce and market in relation to Government Procurement, strengthening clusters and qualifying business support services for SMEs, facilitating logistic and testing facilities for product quality and standards SMEs user friendly, raising awareness and promoting intellectual asset based management by SMEs, Multinational Enterprises/SMEs linkages).

The final OECD Tokyo Action Statement within its Innovation Strategy approved by the 2007 OECD Council at Ministerial level and the upcoming OECD Framework for evaluation on SMEs programmes and policies, may constitute a possible structured field of collaboration among the EESC and international institutions, in particular through the involvement of SMEs organisations, various interest groups organisations and interests represented by civil society when approaching SMEs internationalisation policies, innovation as well as sustainable environmental and safety standards policies for SMEs.

(information available on: <http://www.the-convention.co.jp/tokyo-conference/>).

Report from Pavel TRANTINA on "European Youth Week: Youth in Action" held at the EESC from 4-6 June 2007.



The 3rd European Youth Week was taking place throughout Europe from 3-10 June 2007. In Brussels, there was a centralised event (3-6 June) to promote the Youth in Action Programme and European Youth Policies, and to contribute to the structured dialogue with young people. EESC contributed by giving its premise for the disposal of more than 200 young people to meet on 4 and 5 June and by active participation of its members. Group III was represented by EESC's Vice-President Ms Jillian van Turnhout and myself, who both gave interviews to European Youth Press, by Mr. Tomasz Czajkowski, who served as a resource person to one of the working groups, and by Mr. Hervé Coupeau. Participants - young people from all parts of Europe - formed working groups to discuss the main elements of the general theme "social inclusion and diversity of young people in Europe". One objective of event was to promote and raise the awareness of the new Youth in Action Programme. It also highlighted the achievements and success of projects supported by the previous Youth Programme, which ran from 2000-2006, by awarding best practice projects by "YouthPass" during a festive ceremony. Finally, the attendees also had the possibility to participate in a political round table debate attended by members of the European Commission Mr. Jan Figel, Mr. Vladimír Špidla and also Mr. Hénri Malosse, President of Group I of EESC.

The final conclusions of the Brussels event were forwarded to the Commission and the Council of Youth Ministers, and are expected to be taken into account in their policy formulation. You can find them and much more interesting information at www.youthweek.eu.

In addition, Group III member and EESC Vice-President, Jillian van Turnhout, was interviewed by the Youthweek team and the full text of the interview is available on the website: <http://www.youthweek.eu/get-informed.html>



Highlights of our Members' Work

At its plenary session on 30-31 May the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs.

Mrs Jillian van TURNHOUT (IE) SOC/257



"European Strategy on alcohol related harm"
(EESC opinion 807/07)

In this opinion, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) welcomes the Communication from the Commission, "An EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm". However, the EESC regrets that the Communication falls far short of a "comprehensive strategy" which was invited in the Council Conclusions of 5 June 2001.

Furthermore, the EESC asks the Commission, in recognition of its treaty obligations, to show strong leadership by actively supporting Member States in their efforts to provide a high level of health protection by reducing alcohol related harm and to ensure that Community action complements national policies.

The EESC welcomes the development of a common evidence base, including standardised definitions for data collection, which will provide a strong EU added value dimension. The EESC regrets that most of the priority areas identified do not include specific objectives with clear measurable targets and timelines and suggests that a reduction in the exposure of children to alcohol products, advertising and promotions be included as a specific objective to provide greater protection to children. It also urges the Commission to address the economic consequences of alcohol related harm. The negative effects go against the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and have implications for the workplace, society and the economy.

In conclusion, the EESC strongly recommends that education and awareness raising initiatives should be part of an overall integrated strategy to reduce alcohol related harm.

Mr Richard ADAMS (UK) - NAT/349



"Aviation activities/scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance"
(EESC opinion 801/07)

The Committee welcomes the proposed Directive which offers a carefully considered and pragmatic approach to moderating and compensating for the rapidly growing volume of greenhouse gases emitted by the aviation industry.

By bringing aviation within the remit of the European Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) the scheme is itself potentially strengthened and made more robust as the pre-eminent model for tackling CO2 emissions at a global level.

The proposal is realistic. It recognises the strength of political, economic and consumer pressures for the continuing development of air travel and transport whilst using the market mechanism of the ETS to compensate for one of the main, damaging external impacts of the aviation industry. The EESC welcomes the inclusion in the scheme of all flights into or out of Europe from 2012 but believes that the emissions cap – set approximately at the 2005 level – should be

lower and more consistent with levels required of other sectors in the ETS.

In conclusion, the Committee recognises that this is a complex issue but feels the proposal is somewhat opaque and fails to present its advantages clearly. The proposal appeals in different ways and at various levels to the EU as a whole, to individual Member States, to different sectors of industry and to the public. In particular the positive potential of the Directive to support and reinforce the ETS should be emphasised. It is also noted that active and complementary support will be required from other parts of the Commission, particularly Transport and Energy and Research.

Mr Mario CAMPLI (IT) - NAT/352



"Fruit and vegetables"
(EESC opinion 802/07)

In this opinion the EESC supports the Commission's strategy aimed at turning the entire first pillar into a consistent and balanced whole by 2013; to this end, it calls on the Commission to put in place an appropriate transition programme for the fruit and vegetable sector so as to bring all the operators in the sector up to speed with the new system and, at the same time, to ensure that European consumers enjoy security of adequate supply in terms of quality and quantity.

The EESC notes that the Commission has made its proposals within the constraints of a budget that has not been increased. It also notes that by abolishing market withdrawals and export refunds the Commission is bringing about an increase in the resources potentially available for future operational programmes, but that these resources risk being left unused and will not be available for investment by more efficient POs.

The EESC believes it necessary to introduce at least two corrections, whilst keeping to the principle of genuine budget neutrality: leaving the management of market crises out of the accounts relating to the PO's operational programme; derogating from the 4.1 % limit when actions are co-financed at 60%, *inter alia* to allow POs that are already consolidated to continue fulfilling their role as a counterweight to the buying power of the Large Multiples; including joint measures by two or more producer organisations among those which receive 60% Community co-financing, so as to promote cooperation between producer organisations and group supply.

In conclusion, the EESC also notes the Commission proposal to entrust crisis management to POs and calls on the Commission to put in place transparent criteria for crisis management to support non-member producers and ensure that the instruments made available for this purpose can be used by all producers, so that any intervention in the event of a crisis will be effective and enable the markets in question to recover.

Mr Staffan NILSSON (SV) Co-Rapporteur



- REX/228
"Challenges and opportunities facing the EU in the context of globalisation"
(EESC opinion 804/07)

In its opinion the EESC states that at international level, the EU response to the globalisation must be to contribute more forcefully

to the establishment of a "state governed by the rule of law" promoting a humanist globalisation based on the multilateralism, the fundamental rights of individuals, greater transparency on the financial markets and a high level of health and food safety for all population groups. In the field of international trade, the EESC takes the view that bilateral approaches are beneficial only insofar as they are complementary to the multilateralism pursued by the WTO.

Inside the EU, globalisation may be a source of opportunity for the European integration by stepping up economic integration and solidarity which are core aspects of the Lisbon Strategy. Organised civil society should promote the achievement of globalisation "with a human face". The EESC stresses the need to fully involve the social partners and the various players representing organised civil society.

In conclusion, the achievement of both globalisation with a human dimension and European integration are matters which involve the people and organised civil society. If they are better informed and consulted and systematically involved, the peoples of Europe will take on board a strategy which they have shaped and which they can make their own.

Mr Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) - INT/334



"Protection of consumers – distance contracts"
(EESC opinion 795/07)

In this opinion, whilst noting the delay in the publication of this communication in relation to the deadlines set down in the directive, the EESC welcomes the initiative and agrees with a great number of the Commission's comments. The Committee is of the view, however, that it would be valuable for a review of these rules to be carried out immediately, in conjunction with a review of those on the distance selling of financial services and certain aspects of electronic commerce, without waiting for work on the review of the Community acquis concerning consumer contracts to be concluded, out of a concern to make all the disparate provisions more accessible and easier to understand.

The EESC therefore urges the Commission to carry out a detailed analysis of the responses to its public consultation exercise that have been received in the meantime, to which it should add reliable statistical data on the scope and scale of distance selling in the internal market, culminating in a public hearing of the interested parties.

The EESC disagrees with the Commission's assessment of the consequences of the use made of the "minimum clause", which it does not consider to be the cause of the directive's implementation problems – which are rightly highlighted. The Committee does not, however, reject the possibility of envisaging a move towards total harmonisation, by means of regulation, provided that consumers are guaranteed a higher level of protection.

The EESC is also putting forward a broad range of specific recommendations, which it considers should be studied, at the present stage of development of the internal market, in order to boost consumer safeguards and confidence, guaranteeing protection in this type of transaction equivalent to that enjoyed by consumers concluding contracts face-to-face.

In conclusion, the EESC also points to the need for a particular focus on providing contracting parties – particularly less well-informed consumers – with real information, and also that there should be an effective system for sanctioning practices that breach existing legal provisions.

Mr Panagiotis GKOFAS – INT/356



"Food hygiene/abolition of price discrimination"
(EESC opinion 797/07)

In this opinion, with regard to Community policies for better regulation, the European Economic and Social Committee considers reducing the administrative burden placed on businesses by existing legislation to be a necessary and crucial factor in boosting competitiveness and achieving the goals of the Lisbon agenda.

The proposal submitted to the EESC entails the amendment of two regulations: Regulation No 11 concerning the abolition of discrimination in transport rates and conditions, and Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 of the European Parliament and the Council on the hygiene of foodstuffs.

The EESC agrees with the amendment of Regulation 852/2004, intended to provide for the exemption of the relevant businesses from the requirements of Article 5(1) of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004, since these may be met through all the regulation's other requirements. However, the EESC considers that the exemption of businesses who sell their products directly to the final consumer should also be extended to small enterprises, as defined by Recommendation 2003/361/EC concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

In conclusion the EESC considers that extending the exemption in this way will probably mean incorporating two requirements in the amendment of Article 5 of Regulation 852. The provision would include small enterprises and with their inclusion a specific reference and restrictions for catering businesses would be introduced.

Mr Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER



- TEN/295
"Future eAccessibility legislation"
(EESC opinion 810/07)

In this opinion, the EESC supports the Commission's initiative on eAccessibility, and urges it to further its work in the field. Given the strong interest raised by this topic, the EESC reserves the right to issue an additional opinion.

The EESC believes that the involvement of civil society organisations is a key factor in the implementation of a proper eAccessibility policy, through the promotion of support measures, for example, with regard to codes of conduct or co-regulation.

Support measures should focus on areas which make it easier for people with disabilities and older people to access the information society, and introduce them to new technologies as an ideal means of becoming socially integrated, preventing exclusion from the digital world and improving their quality of life.

In conclusion the EESC feels that public authorities in Member States should, in line with supranational guidelines, adopt various support measures to make it financially possible for disabled or elderly people's organisations to be involved in the digital world, and to facilitate their access to it.

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