

FOLLOW-UP PROVIDED BY THE COMMISSION TO THE OPINIONS OF THE

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

PLENARY SESSIONS OF OCTOBER AND DECEMBER 2015

N°	Title	References	Plenary Month
SG			
1. co-lead DG CNECT	<p>Digital single market strategy (communication)</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe</p> <p>Rapporteur-general: Raymond HENCKS (GRII-LU) Co-rapporteur: Thomas MCDONOGH (GRI-IE)</p>	<p>COM(2015) 192 final</p> <p>EESC-2015-03604-AS-TRA</p> <p>TEN/574</p>	December
DG NEAR			
2. Co-lead DG ENER	<p>Energy – a factor for development and a deeper accession process in the Western Balkans</p> <p>Rapporteur-general: Pierre Jean COULON (GRII-FR)</p>	<p>EESC-2015-02407-AS-TRA</p> <p>REX/440</p> <p>own-initiative opinion</p>	October
DG EMPL			
3.	<p>Continuing education and training (CVET) in rural areas</p> <p>Rapporteur-general: Brendan BURNS (GRI-UK) Co-rapporteur: Pavel TRANTINA (GRIII-CZ)</p>	<p>EESC-2014-06815-AS-TRA</p> <p>NAT/650</p> <p>own-initiative opinion</p>	October
DG REGIO			
4.	<p>EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (communication)</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning a European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region</p> <p>Rapporteur-general: Stefano PALMIERI (GRII-IT)</p>	<p>COM(2015) 366 final</p> <p>EESC-2015-03720-AS-TRA</p> <p>ECO/382</p>	October

5.	<p>Regulation amending the regulation on the Structural Funds – specific measures for Greece</p> <p>Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund as regards specific measures for Greece</p> <p>Rapporteur-general: Carmelo CEDRONE (GRII-IT)</p>	<p>COM(2015) 365 final – 2015/0160 (COD)</p> <p>EESC-2015-04723-00-00-PAC-TRA</p> <p>ECO/387</p>	October
DG GROW			
6.	<p>Nanotechnology for a competitive chemical industry</p> <p>Rapporteur: Egbert BIERMANN (GRII-DE) Corapporteur: Tautvydas MISIŪNAS (GRI-LT)</p>	<p>EESC-2015-03991-AS-TRA</p> <p>CCMI/140</p> <p>own-initiative opinion</p>	December
7.	<p>The role of engineers in reindustrialising Europe</p> <p>Rapporteur: Antonello PEZZINI (GRI-IT) Corapporteur: Zbigniew KOTOWSKI (GRIII-PL)</p>	<p>EESC-2015-01068-AS-TRA</p> <p>CCMI/139</p> <p>own-initiative opinion</p>	December
DG COMP			
8.	<p>Report on Competition Policy 2014</p> <p>Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Report on Competition Policy 2014</p> <p>Rapporteur: Reine-Claude MADER (GRIII-FR)</p>	<p>COM(2015) 247 final</p> <p>EESC-2015-03837-AS-TRA</p> <p>INT/771</p>	December

DG CLIMA			
9.	<p>Revision of the EU emissions trading system (ETS)</p> <p>Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2003/87/EC to enhance cost-effective emission reductions and low-carbon investments</p> <p>Rapporteur: Antonello PEZZINI (GRI-IT)</p>	<p>COM(2015) 337 final - 2015/0148 COD</p> <p>EESC-2015-04053-AS-TRA</p> <p>NAT/675</p>	December
DG EAC			
10.	<p>Engaged universities shaping Europe</p> <p>Rapporteur: Joost VAN IERSEL (GRI-NL)</p>	<p>EESC-2015-02595-AS-TRA</p> <p>SOC/524</p> <p>own-initiative opinion</p>	December
DG AGRI			
11.	<p>CAP simplification</p> <p>Rapporteur: Seamus Boland (GRIII-IE)</p>	<p>EESC-2015-04293-AS-TRA</p> <p>NAT/672</p> <p>exploratory opinion</p>	December
DG TAXUD			
12.	<p>Action plan on fairer corporate taxation (communication)</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: A fair and efficient corporate tax system in the European Union: 5 key areas for action</p> <p>Rapporteur: Petru SORIN DANDEA (GRII-RO) Corapporteur: Paulo BARROS VALE (GRI-PT)</p>	<p>COM(2015) 302 final</p> <p>EESC-2015-02961-AS-TRA</p> <p>ECO/383</p>	December

DG HOME			
13.	<p>A European Agenda on Migration (communication)</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A European Agenda on Migration</p> <p>Rapporteur: Stefano MALLIA (GRI–MT) Co-rapporteur: Cristian PÎRVULESCU (GRIII–RO)</p>	<p>COM(2015) 240 final</p> <p>EESC-2015-04319-AS-TRA</p> <p>SOC/525</p>	December
14.	<p>A permanent crisis relocation mechanism under the Dublin system</p> <p>Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a crisis relocation mechanism and amending Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third country national or a stateless person</p> <p>Rapporteur: Cristian PÎRVULESCU (GRIII–RO)</p>	<p>COM(2015) 450 final – 2015/0208 COD</p> <p>SOC/526</p>	December
15.	<p>EU Action plan against migrant smuggling (2015-2020) (communication)</p> <p>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015-2020)</p> <p>Rapporteur: Brenda KING (GRI–UK)</p>	<p>COM(2015)285 final</p> <p>EESC-2015-03940-AS-TRA</p> <p>REX/452</p>	December

16.	<p>A European list of safe countries of origin</p> <p>Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an EU common list of safe countries of origin for the purposes of Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection, and amending Directive 2013/32/EU</p> <p>Rapporteur: Jose Antonio MORENO DIAZ (GR11-ES)</p>	<p>COM(2015) 452 final – 2015/0211 COD</p> <p>REX/457</p>	December
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<p>N°1 Digital Single Market Strategy COM(2015) 192 final – EESC 2005/3604 – TEN/574 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Raymond HENCKS (GRII-LU) Corapporteur: Mr Thomas MCDONOGH (GRI-IE) SG – Vice-President ANSIP</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>The EESC supports the European Digital Single Market Strategy. However, it is concerned by a lack of political will in some Member States to open themselves up to a digital union that is both creative and innovative, rather than merely consumerist.</p>	<p>The general approach of the Opinion will help the Commission in going forward with its work on the Digital Single Market (DSM). A large number of the policy requests are in line with current and planned work, and the Commission can react positively to many positions the EESC has expressed in its Opinion. In its response, the Commission focusses particularly on those areas where the Committee has called for further action.</p>
<p>The EESC regrets the absence of a social dimension in the digital strategy (with the exception of issues related to digital skills), as the development of business services and models will lead to profound changes in the labour market. The EESC believes that the social dimension, with all its implications for employment, should form the fourth pillar of the European Digital Single Market Strategy.</p>	<p>In its Strategy, the Commission points to the fact that a digital economy can also make society more inclusive. Citizens and businesses are not currently getting the full benefits from digital services (from e-government, e-health, e-energy to e-transport) that should be available seamlessly across the EU. The Commission has noted the need to engage with the social partners and invited them to include the Digital Single Market in their social dialogue at European level.</p>
<p>The EESC notes that digital skills and</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the</p>

expertise, particularly for many sections of EU citizens, are far from adequate, as are the Commission's proposals in this respect.

importance of digital skills for ensuring that the benefits of the DSM are exploited to the full. In fact, as stated in the Digital Single Market Strategy, the Commission will address digital skills and expertise as a key component of its future initiatives on skills and training (see below). Demand for IT professionals is growing by around 4% a year. Shortages of ICT professionals in the EU could reach 825 000 unfilled vacancies by 2020 if no decisive action is taken. Digital skills levels need also to be raised among employees in all economic sectors and among job seekers to improve their employability. Change is needed in the way education and training systems adapt to the digital revolution. These changes can draw on EU-level initiatives such as the "Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs", "EU Code Week" and "Opening up Education".

As the EESC notes, the responsibility for curricula lies with the Member States which need to address the lack of essential digital skills. The Commission will support their efforts and will play its role in enhancing the recognition of digital skills and qualifications and increasing the level of ICT professionalism in Europe.

In its 2016 Work Programme, the Commission has indicated that in its New Skills Agenda it will promote life-long investment in people, from vocational training and higher education through to digital and high-tech expertise and the life skills needed

	for citizens' active engagement in changing workplaces and societies.
<p>The EESC regrets that the Commission is not giving the necessary priority to these critical success factors for the DSM and the European information society;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adoption of a Priority ICT Standards Plan and extending the European Interoperability Framework for public services; - new e-Government Action Plan including an initiative on the "Once-Only" principle and an initiative on building up the interconnection of business registers. <p>Taken together, these initiatives will affect citizens, SMEs, government and private sector services and sectoral applications central to DSM achievement. These proposals seem to lack precision and urgency.</p>	<p>The Commission does not share the view that it is not giving the necessary priority to success factors for the DSM and that its plans for ICT Standards and e-Government lack precision. In its April 2016 DSM technologies and public services modernisation package, the Commission has presented a coherent framework for tackling the digitisation of Europe's economy. The package includes three Communications covering (i) the Priority ICT Standards Plan, (ii) the European Cloud initiative and (iii) the e-Government Action Plan 2016-2020. The Commission's aims with this package are <i>inter-alia</i>:</p> <p>To make available rapidly the essential ICT standards for boosting digital innovations, particularly in five key domains of 5G Communications, Cloud Computing, the Internet of Things (IoT), (Big) Data technologies and Cybersecurity.</p> <p>Through the e-Government action plan on digital transformation of public services, the Commission is focussing on business and citizens' needs, i.e. solutions that are online, cross-border, interoperable by default and solutions that are end-to-end by design.</p>
<p>During his presentation of the new European Commission's political guidelines, Mr Juncker expressed the view that "By creating a connected digital</p>	<p>The figure of EUR 415 billion in addition to European GDP is taken from the European Parliament Research Service, Mapping the cost of</p>

<p>single market, we can generate up to EUR 250 billion of additional growth in Europe [...] thereby creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs". According to the communication in question, this "could contribute an additional EUR 415 billion to European GDP", while the two commissioners in charge of digitalisation refer to 3.8 million jobs to be generated by a digital single market.</p> <p>The EESC feels that it is counterproductive to bombard the public with statistics, as these tend to vary considerably depending on which Commission source is providing them, yet are presented as irrefutable if somewhat unconvincing facts. Such declarations will ultimately result in people distrusting political decision-makers and remaining indifferent to the real problems.</p> <p>To date, the Commission has never produced any evidence that its predictions in this area have materialised. The EESC requests that the present Commission take stock of its findings at the end of its term and compare these to its initial predictions.</p>	<p>Non-Europe, 2014-2019, 2015.</p> <p>The Commission does not share the EESC's view that it has never produced any evidence as to progress in the digital sector, and in that context would refer the EESC to its Digital Scoreboard which contains up to date and detailed information on a range of Digital Economy and Society indicators. The Commission also seeks to improve the quality of the data and analysis needed to underpin the Digital Single Market by pooling the relevant knowledge and making it easily accessible to the public. It will further develop its Digital Economy and Society Index indicators.</p>
<p>The EESC considers it unrealistic to believe that the digital single market can be implemented during the Commission's current term of office, especially seeing as the relevant scientific research and impact studies supporting such claims have not been made public. The EESC feels that the Commission's projections ought to be compared with those studies that predict substantial job losses as a result of digital change.</p>	<p>The Commission is at full-speed in terms of implementation of the DSM. It has already presented three proposals in December 2015 – i.e. two proposals for directives on certain aspects concerning (i) contracts for the online and other distance sales of goods and (ii) contracts for the supply of digital content and one proposal for a regulation on cross-border portability of online content services. The latter proposal corresponds to the first</p>

	<p>concrete copyright modernisation initiative.</p> <p>In February 2016 the Commission presented a legislative proposal on 700 MHz band (UHF). This year it will present the remaining DSM proposals in a series of packages. The Commission's overall aim is to have all proposals adopted by the legislature before the end of the mandate of this Commission. However, the Commission agrees that achieving this will require the support of the other Institutions.</p>
<p>In paragraph 3.11. the EESC notes that the European Union is being left behind. The digital economy has become the preserve of the United States and Asia. The 50 or so major EU e-commerce operators are subjected to 28 different national regulatory frameworks, whereas the six biggest operators in the American market and the three giants of the Chinese market are overseen by a single regulatory framework. The image of an intra-European digital market as a factor in integration is no longer appropriate in a borderless digital world; it has not, moreover, prevented major third country platforms from establishing monopolies or oligopolies in most EU countries.</p>	<p>As the Commission notes in its DSM Strategy, Europe has the capabilities to lead in the global digital economy but we are currently not making the most of them. Fragmentation and barriers that do not exist in the physical Single Market are holding the EU back. To meet these challenges, the DSM Strategy is built around three pillars:</p> <p>(I) Better access for consumers and businesses to online goods and services across Europe – this requires the rapid removal of key differences between the online and offline worlds to break down barriers to cross-border online activity.</p> <p>(II) Creating the right conditions for digital networks and services to flourish – this requires high-speed, secure and trustworthy infrastructures and content services, supported by the right regulatory conditions for innovation, investment, fair</p>

	<p>competition and a level playing field.</p> <p>(III) Maximising the growth potential of our European Digital Economy – this requires investment in ICT infrastructures and technologies such as Cloud computing and Big Data, and research and innovation to boost industrial competitiveness as well as better public services, inclusiveness and skills.</p> <p>If we work together to achieve these goals at EU and national level, Europe will keep pace with the best economies in the world.</p>
<p>Referring to the Commission's comprehensive analysis of the role of platforms in the market including illegal content on the internet, the EESC cautions the Commission that it should not inhibit the operations of these companies just because they are both big and successful. To do so runs the risk of putting obstacles in the way of developing the digital single market in Europe.</p> <p>That being said, the five action points proposed by the Commission are reasonable and sensible. They have the potential to enhance the utility of platforms in the digital single market. It is essential that the Commission should adopt a balanced approach and not disregard the legitimate commercial interests of the platforms.</p>	<p>Online platforms (e.g. search engines, social media, e-commerce platforms, app stores, price comparison websites) are playing an ever more central role in social and economic life: they enable consumers to find online information and businesses to exploit the advantages of e-commerce. Europe has a strong potential in this area but is held back by fragmented markets which make it hard for businesses to scale-up.</p> <p>Some platforms can control access to online markets and exercise significant influence over various players. Others worry about the lack of transparency, non-discrimination, switching between platforms/services, level playing field and fair competition.</p> <p>In its assessment of the role of platforms in the market, the Commission is carrying out studies and is engaged in a thorough analysis of the</p>

	<p>replies to the public consultations. It has received over 1 035 through EU Survey plus 10 000 others indirectly.</p> <p>Questions relating to the role of platforms are also being dealt with under different sectoral instruments (Review of the Telecoms Framework, Review of the Audio Visual Media Framework, Copyright, Network and Information Security Directive, geo-blocking). Therefore, a coherent approach at EU level is essential.</p> <p>The Commission will report on its assessment in the summer of 2016.</p>
<p>4.2.4 Review of the e-Privacy Directive</p> <p>The EESC endorses this approach to personal data protection. The EESC is not convinced that the present status of the "right to be forgotten" is tenable in the long term because the present EU interpretation is too broad and because it is technically difficult to maintain this right within the global internet. The Committee urges the Commission to refine this "right" to protect the vulnerable in order to ensure its global acceptance.</p>	<p>The new General Data Protection Regulation enshrines the "right to be forgotten" meaning that when personal data are no longer necessary for the purposes for which they were collected or the individual withdraws his consent, and provided that there are no legitimate grounds for retaining it, the data will be erased. This is about protecting the personal data of individuals, not about erasing past events or restricting freedom of the press.</p> <p>As indicated in the Commission Work Programme 2015, a REFIT evaluation of the e-privacy Directive with a focus on regulatory fitness will be carried out in line with the new Commission working methods, REFIT and Better Regulation principles and feed into the Impact Assessment for the review of the e-Privacy Directive. The objectives of the review of the e-Privacy</p>

	<p>Framework are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - simplifying the legal framework and ensuring consistency with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)/other legal instruments; - updating the scope of the e-Privacy Directive (ePD) in light of the new market and technological reality; - ensuring effective and efficient protection against intrusions into confidentiality of communications and users' equipment; - addressing fragmentation and inconsistent enforcement.
<p>4.2.5 Establishment of a cybersecurity contractual public-private partnership</p> <p>In the digital economy, the various stages of the value chain know no boundaries and transcend the national dimension, which contributes to the spread of cyber-crime. The EESC welcomes the fact that the digital single market strategy provides for a partnership with industry regarding cyber-security, to the extent that a culture of risk management and efficient flow of information, which has been a long time in the making, will finally take shape.</p> <p>There is one characteristic of cyber-crime which the Commission has not addressed: information and communication</p>	<p>The Commission has launched a public consultation which ran from 18 December 2015 to 11 March 2016.</p> <p>The Commission has also published a Roadmap¹ which provides more detail on the nature of the proposed cybersecurity Public-Private Partnership (PPP). The objectives are:</p> <p>(I) To overcome current ICT security products and solutions supply market fragmentation to create a European single market for innovative ICT security products and solutions, helping European supply industry achieve economies of scale and compete on a European and global</p>

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015_cnect_004_cybersecurity_en.pdf.

technology offers possibilities for cyber-surveillance that risk being exploited in order to control data and personal communication at the expense of individual freedom, or could even be used to spy on states and their governments. With this in mind, the EESC considers it necessary to make arrangements to pool information and improve detection and intervention capacities at EU level.

The Commission gives no indication of the scope of the proposed partnership, the expected outputs or the partnership structure (one or many partners). The EESC also highlights the scale of market investment in cybersecurity at the present time. For both these reasons, the EESC cannot comment on this proposal until more is known.

level;

(II) Secure European digital technologies - ensure that European citizens, enterprises (including SMEs), public administrations have access to the latest digital security technology developments, which are interoperable, competitive, trustworthy and based on European rules;

(III) Limit the risk and the impact of cybersecurity incidents, while increasing consumers' and citizens' trust and fostering the EU digital economy

In addition, it is worth recalling that improving the resilience of communication and information systems in Europe is important to support the Digital Single Market. The EU Cybersecurity Strategy and the European Agenda on Security provide the overall strategic framework for EU initiatives on cybersecurity and cybercrime. The EU has been active in developing awareness, cooperation mechanisms and responses under the Cybersecurity Strategy deliverables. In particular, the proposed Network and Information Security (NIS) Directive addresses cybersecurity risks for a broad range of essential service providers in the fields of energy, transport, finance and health. These providers, as well as providers of key digital services (e.g. cloud computing) should take appropriate security measures and report serious incidents to national authorities.

<p>N°2 Energy - A factor for development and a deeper accession process in the Western Balkans (own-initiative opinion) EESC 2015/2407 - REX/440 511th Plenary Session – October 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Pierre-Jean COULON (GRIF-FR) DG NEAR – Commissioner HAHN</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>1.1. Following the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum held in Belgrade on 2 and 3 June 2015, the EESC asks "for [the] Energy Community, which aims to expand the EU's energy acquis to enlargement and neighbourhood countries, to be further strengthened and closely integrated into the project of Energy Union; energy should be a factor for the development and interconnectivity of the region, and the citizens of the Western Balkans should be given a clear idea of the economic and environmental benefits of accession to the EU".</p>	<p>Strengthening of the Energy Community is one of the objectives of the Energy Union and this is being implemented. A series of legal acts implementing the goals of the Energy Union, such as the Energy Efficiency Directive and the Energy Infrastructure Regulation as well as acts reforming the functioning of the Energy Community were adopted at the end of 2015 (by the Energy Community's Ministerial Council). Further acts are proposed for this year.</p> <p>The Energy Community is a vehicle for extending the Energy Union to our closest energy partners, and those that have committed to apply the energy <i>acquis</i>.</p>
<p>1.2. The plan for an Energy Union to improve energy interconnectivity should include the western Balkans.</p>	<p>This is the essence of the EU's Connectivity Agenda, whereby investment in infrastructure (power and gas interconnections and transmission networks) is accompanied by a reform process. The Vienna summit of the Balkans Process (in August 2015) saw the countries commit to creating a regional energy market, whilst the EU</p>

	pledged funding for four interconnection projects.
1.6. Investment in renewables is necessary, and must be based on reinforced connections and networks and supported by a clear and sound legal framework.	Whilst the investment in generation capacity itself should (mostly) come from the private sector, the EU can help with the preparatory work. It is also providing assistance to develop the right regulatory framework for attracting that investment. Work on creating the regional power market will also help integrate renewable energy capacity in a regional rather than purely national context.
1.7 Balkan civil society must be systematically involved and integrated in the meetings of the Energy Community, working through the EESC and its local partners.	One of the reforms of the Energy Community, adopted at its Ministerial Meeting at the end of 2015, creates a framework for the dialogue with civil society.
1.8 The EESC calls for better interregional cooperation and the development of projects in the field of energy, which will enhance regional stability and job creation.	The planned creation of a regional power market aims for precisely this: targeting funding for power transmission projects of a real regional significance, whilst also removing barriers to exchanges of power throughout the region.
2.3 In the framework of the accession negotiations, candidate countries should be encouraged to implement the EU <i>acquis</i> as soon as possible in order to promote their integration into the EU internal energy market, to the benefit of their citizens.	This is one of the objectives of the Energy Community, whereby its Contracting Parties commit to applying a substantial proportion of the EU Energy <i>acquis</i> , regardless of their accession timetable. The experiences with Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia have shown that membership of the Energy Community has helped the accession process, but also brought the benefits to citizens of implementing the EU Energy <i>acquis</i> .

<p>2.4. The new Commission has made the creation of an Energy Union one of its highest priorities: this is the sole portfolio of a Commission Vice-president, and no less than a dozen other Commissioners are also involved. This Energy Union, which the EESC has been calling for several years (see TEN/493, for example) is finally on the agenda, and countries likely to join the Union in the short or medium term must not be excluded from the early discussions. The opinion referred to above made express reference to the need to take these countries into account.</p>	<p>The first stage of the Energy Union will be focused on the necessary internal bases, whilst also recognising that an Energy Union cannot be limited to 28 Member States. The Energy Union Communication¹ explicitly states that it will work with the Energy Community as part of the external dimension. This acknowledges the commitment that the Energy Union Contracting Parties have made to apply the EU Energy <i>acquis</i>.</p>
<p>2.6. A balance needs to be struck between conventional and renewable energies: to this end, new interconnections need to be established between energy networks, or existing interconnections with the Union's networks strengthened. Gas is an important issue and supplies must be secured by means of interconnections with the EU as well as by the construction of a methane terminal. Finally, the Turkish Stream gas pipeline project, which replaces the abortive South Stream, is an opportunity, as are the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) and Ionian Adriatic gas Pipeline (IAP) projects. It should be borne in mind that this region is almost inevitably a conduit between the production regions (oil, gas) and the major consumer regions in the Union. But the priority must be the use of existing infrastructures, which are often underexploited; the use of reverse flows must be encouraged: given the need</p>	<p>The project to create a regional power market in the Balkans is intended to optimise the use of existing infrastructure (rather than systematically building new infrastructure).</p> <p>The EU's CESEC initiative is a reply to the region's vulnerability to a gas supply disruption. Rather than developing new gas routes (which should be the choice of the project developers), it aims to focus resources on key segments (such as cross-border interconnectors) which often have difficulties attracting financing.</p>

¹ COM(2015) 572 final.

<p>for security of energy supply, large, vulnerable gas pipelines should not be given priority</p>	
<p>3.4.2. Adoption of the Union <i>acquis</i> in energy and incorporating energy into the internal market require clear progress in the region's practices with regard to energy pricing, so that prices take into account real costs and are not based on a policy of price subsidy.</p>	<p>One of the aims of the Energy Community is to strengthen the capacity and independence of energy regulators (including on tariff adjustments and setting), in line with EU internal energy market rules.</p>
<p>4.1. We have seen the need to strengthen electrical interconnections within the region, as well as into and out of it, together with supply routes, particularly for natural gas, and possibly to construct a methane terminal. This would obviously be located in the Adriatic part of the region; it would be shared by the states of the region, or at least most of them, and would facilitate the supply of LNG from more distant sources and, in due course, from the eastern Mediterranean (Cyprus).</p>	<p>The project to create a regional power market in the Balkans is intended to optimise the use of existing infrastructure (rather than systematically building new infrastructure).</p> <p>The EU's CESEC initiative is a reply to the region's vulnerability to a gas supply disruption. Rather than developing new gas routes (which should be the choice of the project developers), it aims to focus resources on key segments (such as cross-border interconnectors) which often have difficulties attracting financing.</p> <p>The choice of location for an LNG terminal is for the project promoters, although the CESEC initiative is looking at the connections from the possible LNG terminal at Krk in Croatia with the rest of the region.</p>
<p>4.1.1. The recent signing (on 10 July 2015), in relation to gas connectivity in central and south-eastern Europe (CESEC initiative), of a Memorandum of Understanding between the European Commission and Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania,</p>	<p>The CESEC initiative is open to other partners to join, including Montenegro (which chose not to join in the absence of any real natural gas market).</p>

<p>FYROM, Serbia and Ukraine should facilitate diversification in the supply of natural gas and the integration of markets in the region. The EESC would like to see Montenegro become a signatory to this memorandum.</p>	
<p>4.2. The regional energy mix is in fact unbalanced; there is no true market, with the structure of the mix varying from one country to another and prices almost always being regulated and often maintained at an artificially low level, which provides no incentive for energy efficiency or for investment in diversified sources.</p>	<p>The project to create a regional power market in the Balkans is intended to optimise the use of existing infrastructure (rather than systematically building new infrastructure).</p> <p>The energy mix of a country is its sovereign choice. However, the regional power market is intended to introduce sound EU energy market practices into the region, including power price regulation in a way that will send the correct price signals to policy choices.</p>
<p>4.4.1 These opportunities must be assessed in terms of coordinated investment, but above all in terms of the potential for developing activities and creating jobs, particularly in the new energy technologies (green jobs), and solving the problem of energy poverty. The Energy Union must serve to develop these activities, including through EIB financing.</p>	<p>The European Investment Bank (EIB) is part of the connectivity initiative, and is co-funding energy projects (through the Western Balkans Investment Framework).</p>

<p>N°3 Continuing education and training (CVET) in rural areas (own-initiative opinion) EESC 2014/6815 - NAT/650 511th Plenary Session - October 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Brendan BURNS (GRI-UK) Corapporteur: Mr Pavel TRANTINA (GRIII-CZ) DG EMPL – Commissioner THYSSEN</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>The EESC wishes to highlight a common European problem concerning the provision of CVET in rural and remote areas, which needs to be addressed.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that people in rural and remote areas can face challenges in accessing lifelong learning, including Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET). In 2014, progress towards the EU benchmark on 15% participation of adults (25-64 years) in lifelong learning only reached 10.7%. For disadvantaged and low-skilled groups the figure is much less.</p>
<p>A new Pan-European agenda is required to encourage European Institutions and national governments, along with businesses, trade unions and other civil society organisations, to improve cooperation so that CVET can be accessed by employees undergoing training and their employers.</p>	<p>The Commission suggests that the sectorial agendas for Vocational Education and Training (VET) (the Copenhagen-Bruges-Riga process) and the Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning provide the basis for this agenda. The Riga conclusions and the priorities for vocational education and training in the ET2020 revised priorities encourage the development of quality assured CVET and access to flexible CVET provision. Promoting work-based learning in all its forms, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, as well as by stimulating innovation and</p>

	<p>entrepreneurship, underpins the policy. Guidelines for SME involvement in work-based learning are foreseen.</p> <p>Therefore, a good foundation exists to build on.</p>
<p>Training for rural businesses must be delivered locally, using ICT and other broadband delivery mechanisms.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that learning should be available in close proximity to the learners. Distance and open learning can improve the situation. The Commission Communication Opening up Education (2013)¹, sets out a European agenda for stimulating high-quality, innovative</p> <p>ways of learning and teaching through new technologies and digital content. It acknowledges that lack of hardware devices or the low penetration of broadband impedes the optimal use of technology and therefore, enhancing local ICT infrastructure (broadband, content, tools) is still needed in some parts of Europe.</p>

¹ COM(2013) 654 final.

<p>N°4 EU Strategy for the Alpine Region COM(2015) 366 final – EESC 2015/3720 – ECO/382 511th Plenary Session - October 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Stefano PALMIERI (GR11-IT) DG REGIO – Commissioner CREȚU</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>1.1. The EESC regrets that the EUSALP does not put the social dimension on the same footing as the environmental and economic aspects. The EESC would therefore like to see a clearly framed mainstreaming of the social dimension that would ensure the pursuit of a growth model that can secure competitiveness and, at the same time, social inclusion and protection, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.</p>	<p>Added value of macro-regional intervention should be higher than EU, national, regional, cross border or transnational solutions. When choosing the priorities of intervention, the Commission applies voluntary restraints, limiting them to a reduced number and to those that can demonstrate their strategic macro-regional relevance, scope and impact.</p>
<p>1.5.1. Along the same lines, the EESC also thinks it vital to bolster the cross-cutting dimension of the EUSALP's objectives in order to better stimulate the harmonisation and balance between economic, environmental and social sustainability, in keeping with a holistic approach to development and social innovation.</p>	<p>The Commission fully supports this cross-cutting dimension. For the first time in a macro-regional strategy, there is a cross-cutting objective aiming to build a sound macro-regional governance model for the Region (to improve cooperation and coordination of action).</p>
<p>1.11. The EESC calls for the launch of a permanent capacity building process to support and enhance the participation of civil society in shaping the EUSALP and for the instigation of a standing forum to represent and support the Alpine region's social and economic partners, while also being active in individual regions affected</p>	<p>The Commission fully supports this approach. As highlighted in the Commission Report on the governance of macro-regional strategies published in May 2014, and reaffirmed in the Commission Communication on the EUSALP on 28 July 2015, the involvement of interested stakeholders –</p>

<p>by the strategy.</p> <p>1.11.1. To this end, the EESC proposes setting up a specific "Going local – EUSALP" programme that provides for the active participation of all the Committee bodies involved in and affected by the development processes proposed by the EUSALP. This "Going local – EUSALP" programme will thus make it possible to introduce – with local civil society – information and training on the activities set out in the action plan, along with opportunities for the various local bodies to participate, while at the same time ensuring that decisions on planned activities are taken jointly.</p>	<p>including civil society, academia, NGOs etc. – and the strengthening of their participation through consultative networks or platforms, is a key element of success for the implementation of macro-regional strategies.</p> <p>This is why the Commission is fully supporting the creation of a permanent EUSALP stakeholder platform (SP) that will strengthen the involvement of civil society, including cooperation of consultative networks or platforms already in place. It will also facilitate communication between non-state actors and key implementers of the EUSALP, contributing to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the Strategy.</p> <p>The purpose of this SP is not to create a new structure, but to allow for a better organisation of flows of information and exchanges of ideas between all parties (existing and new) willing to contribute to the implementation of the Strategy in a constructive way.</p> <p>At the same time, the SP will serve as an awareness-raising and networking tool that will enable ongoing consultation of non-state actors on the implementation of the Action Plan in general, on projects in particular, and on evaluation of the impact of the Strategy. Finally it will also offer a channel through which stakeholders can express wishes and concerns regarding longer-term priorities pursued under the Strategy</p>
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<p>3.8. What distinguishes tourism in Alpine area regions is the variety of activities sought by tourists: nature tourism, sports and activity holidays, health and relaxation, cultural tourism, conferences and events, and even shopping.</p> <p>3.8.1. The priority is to boost sustainable tourism through an integrated policy leading to the definition of rules for the protection of the Alpine region and the dissemination of sustainable development models. Backing also needs to be given to schemes that encourage year-round tourism by promoting kinds of tourism not yet fully exploited (such as health tourism) and through a general improvement in the quality of services in mountain areas.</p>	<p>The Commission supports the development and promotion of transnational thematic products (e.g. transnational cycle or hiking routes like: "EuroVelo" Network of long distance cycle routes, Greenways, itineraries based on nature, rural, gastronomic, pilgrimage tourism, as well as cultural or industrial heritage tourism routes passing by several European countries (European Cultural Routes), in the framework of the COSME programme 2014-2020 .</p> <p>Moreover, the Commission launched, on 22 February 2013, the European Tourism System of Indicators (ETIS) for Sustainable Management at Destination Level¹. The main goal of ETIS is to help local authorities in measuring and monitoring the sustainable tourism performances of their destinations. It provides a simple and user-friendly system which allows destinations to share and benchmark their progress.</p>
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¹ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/offer/sustainable/indicators/index_en.htm.

<p>4.2. The EESC believes that the EUSALP's social dimension is inadequately addressed and needs further reinforcing in order to ensure the development of a growth model that secures competitiveness and, at the same time, social inclusion and protection, especially for those in the most vulnerable and disadvantaged situations.</p>	<p>The question of training and education will be dealt with in Action Group (AG) 3, in connection and complementarity with the other AGs of objective one which is to offer fair job opportunities to the Alpine population, including those in disadvantaged situations. It should also be borne in mind, as a general principle, that the objectives and actions of the strategy are those where it is strategically relevant to address issues at macro-regional level, where it is likely to provide more added value. This also explains that not all questions are taken aboard the Strategy.</p>
<p>4.2.1. To this end, the EUSALP should include measures to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure respect for decent work and labour standards and the adaptability of the workforce to ongoing developments in technology and production systems through re-skilling and lifelong learning processes that make the most of locally available human resources; - mainstream, respect and enhance the gender dimension, especially in the labour market; - encourage the setting-up of social infrastructure and promote social investment; - promote all possible measures that effectively secure equal conditions and opportunities for people with disabilities; - promote and support active ageing as a strategic local resource in the various 	<p>It must be borne in mind that the EUSALP Action Plan is a rolling document. Depending on the evolution of the macro-regional and of the European context on the one hand, and on the first results of the strategy on the other hand, this action plan can be reviewed in a few years, as necessary and appropriate. Some pressing questions in this field can be introduced, provided that participating countries consider these issues must be tackled jointly, and that EUSALP offers the appropriate framework for adequate solutions.</p>

<p>fields of application (tourism, artisanal production, services, and so on);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support measures that exploit the positive side of immigration in order to boost economic growth and social cohesion in the area. 	
<p>4.3.1. The EUSALP's multilevel governance needs to be bolstered by the introduction of an effective horizontal dimension (participation of economic operators, social partners and representatives of civil society). This should complement and enhance the vertical dimension (participation of local and regional authorities), in full compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the application of which is crucial to ensuring the fair territorial redistribution of the benefits the EUSALP yields and to preventing the interests of particular countries and areas from prevailing over common ones.</p>	<p>This is why a fourth cross-cutting objective on governance was introduced in the Strategy (for the first time in a macro-regional strategy), and that several actions (including the stakeholder platform) are planned.</p>

<p>N°5 Amending regulation for Structural Funds – specific measures for Greece COM(2015) 365 final – EESC 2015/4723 – ECO/387 511th Plenary Session - October 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Carmelo CEDRONE (GR11-IT) DG REGIO – Commissioner CREȚU</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>1.2. The Committee believes that the Commission's proposal – which the Commission itself considered being exceptional and which is currently being examined by the European Parliament – does not meet the objectives that it is intended to achieve. The aid does not go far enough – both with regard to financial dimensions and distribution arrangements envisaged (an advance on allocated resources) – in addressing Greece's needs in terms of public investment and re-establishing competitiveness and employment levels within its production system. This injection of liquidity resulting from the application of the new regulation is estimated at around EUR 2 billion. This is certainly a significant amount, but it is not additional and will be balanced out by an equal reduction in resources planned for subsequent years (2018 and 2020).</p>	<p>The Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) modification was to provide extra liquidity and reduce the national co-financing needs for Greek public authorities to support ongoing investments and new investments. This had been identified as the greatest public financial constraints factor for the finalisation of the 2007-2013 programming period and the launching of the new period (2014-2020).</p>

<p>1.3. The EESC has repeatedly stated in its opinions that if the Commission intends to help Greece, the additional resources allocated to the country must be more substantial, whether in the form of new investment programmes or a further reduction in national co-financing quotas required to receive funding for operational programmes financed by the structural funds for the period 2014-2020.</p>	<p>For the 2014-2020 period it is possible for Greece to benefit, upon request, from an increased co-financing rate for expenditure presented until 30 June 2016. This would reduce the national co-financing effort (Article 24 CPR). The Commission will examine the application of this increased co-funding and, if necessary, submit a legislative proposal before 30 June 2016.</p>
<p>1.4. The EESC highlights a second concern related to delays in launching the new structural funds programme. In total, around EUR 35 billion have been allocated to Greece by the Cohesion Policy for the period 2014-2020. The dire economic and political situation that Greece is experiencing has led to uncertainty with regard to investment decisions, along with administrative delays that have prevented it from initiating the necessary procedures to access resources for the new 2014-2020 programming period.</p>	<p>The Commission is working closely with the Greek authorities to address administrative difficulties related to the launching of the new programming period. This includes the mobilisation of technical assistance at the initiative of the Commission.</p>
<p>1.6. The projects currently being implemented in Greece are largely financed with funds from the 2007-2013 programming period. The most recent analyses of the remaining funds for the period 2007-2013 have indicated that around EUR 1.5 to 2 million are still available and will be repaid if they are not used by the end of the year. Given the exceptional circumstances in the country, the Commission could have included an extension of the timescales for reporting expenditure (from n+2 to n+3) in its proposal.</p>	<p>The latest figures available from the Greek authorities indicate that the EU funds expenditure absorption levels are very high. The most significant risk is therefore not linked to the unavailability of enough eligible expenditure by 31/12/2015 to ensure satisfactory absorption of available 2007-2013 EU funds, but to the importance of uncompleted projects which need to be finalised by closure of the programmes in March 2017. The Commission is monitoring the situation in close cooperation with the national</p>

	authorities.
<p>2.2. In summary, in addition to what has been outlined, it is necessary a) to extend the proposal (the removal of co-financing for Greece) to the whole 2014-2020 period; b) to speed up and bring forward support from the Juncker plan to Greece in order to promote economic recovery, development and employment through both arrangements; c) to simplify administrative procedures – and not the opposite; d) for the Commission to establish a joint task force that is able to support and guide Greece at various stages of using the different structural funds; and e) to evaluate the possibility of extending these arrangements or similar measures (accompanied by appropriate checks) to other countries that have been worst affected by the crisis and that have a higher rate of unemployment than the European average.</p>	<p>Regarding the issues directly related to European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF):</p> <p>1) As mentioned before, Greece can benefit, under the existing provisions of the CPR and if it so requests, from an increased co-financing rate for expenditure certified until 30 June 2016. This, coupled with the additional pre-financing available through the CPR modification, should diminish significantly the effort needed from the national budget for the launching of the 2014-2020 period.</p> <p>2) The Commission, in close cooperation with the Greek authorities, is closely monitoring the situation regarding both the closure of the 2007-2013 programming period and the full launching of the new one (2014-2020). This includes discussing measures to be taken at national level to address, and mobilising technical assistance at the initiative of the Commission to assist the national and regional authorities, as well as beneficiaries when required, to improve their administrative and technical capabilities to carry out the ESI Funds supported investments.</p>

<p>N°6 Nanotechnology for a competitive chemical industry (own-initiative opinion) EESC 2015/3991 - CCMI/140 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Egbert BIERMANN (GRII-DE) DG GROW – Commissioner BIENKOWSKA</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>The EESC expects the European Commission to set up an observatory to record and evaluate the development processes, applications, use (recycling) and disposal of nanomaterials.</p>	<p>The Commission is currently working on the option to set up such an observatory, which will also serve the purpose of increasing the information on nanomaterials available to citizens.</p>
<p>An up-to-date "Report on nanomaterials and nanotechnologies in Europe" should be presented before 2020, identifying development trends to 2030.</p>	<p>The Commission has started the preparatory work for the 3rd Regulatory Review on nanomaterials and nanotechnologies in the EU.</p>
<p>The EU standardisation process should be further boosted. Tools should therefore be devised for certified reference materials, in order to test the procedures for measuring the characteristics of nanomaterials.</p>	<p>Standardisation work is ongoing under mandate M/461¹.</p>
<p>The financial instruments provided for in the Horizon 2020 research framework programme relating to the area of nanotechnology must be made simpler and more flexible, particularly for SMEs.</p>	<p>Significant steps toward simplification have already taken place, and the Commission is open to introduce additional simplifying measures during the implementation of Horizon 2020².</p>

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/mandates/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.detail&id=443>.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/what-horizon-2020>.

<p>N°7 The role of engineers in the reindustrialisation of Europe (own-initiative opinion) EESC 2015/1068 - CCMI/139 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Antonello PEZZINI (GRI-IT) Corapporteur: Mr Zbigniew KOTOWSKI (GRIII-PL) DG GROW – Commissioner BIENKOWSKA</p>	
Points of the EESC opinion considered essential	Commission position
<p>1.2 The European Union (EU)'s economic development is increasingly linked to a process of reindustrialisation, seen as a strategy for shifting to new sustainable models for design, production and marketing of high value-added, innovative products incorporating new, high-quality technologies, materials and services in an increasingly digitalised world.</p>	<p>This is being aided by a strategy to support the EU economy through the Commission's key initiatives like the Digital Single Market¹, the Single Market Strategy², the Energy Union³ and the Investment Plan⁴ and programmes such as Horizon2020⁵, COSME ⁶and other tools.</p>
<p>1.3 The EESC believes that the key role played by engineers and technical professions in this process of attempting to resolve the difficulties facing European society as a result of the challenges posed by reindustrialisation should be more strongly emphasised and highlighted, and calls for the launch of a participatory foresight exercise on the future of the</p>	<p>The Commission is preparing a "New Skills Agenda for Europe" to be adopted in June 2016.</p>

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/digital-single-market_en.

² http://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/index_en.htm.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/energy-union-and-climate_en.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/jobs-growth-and-investment/investment-plan_en.

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/>.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cosme/index_en.htm.

profession.	
<p>1.4 The EESC recommends promoting a European culture of entrepreneurship and innovation and launching tangible initiatives to revive the professions of engineer and technician, which drive civilisation and prosperity.</p>	<p>The Commission is already doing this, notably through COSME 2014-2020¹ which was designed with the aim of strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of EU enterprises, encouraging entrepreneurship and promoting SMEs.</p>
<p>1.5 The EESC supports the need for a harmonious European framework driving the profession forward, covering areas such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mutual recognition of professional qualifications; - mobility within the EU and entrepreneurship; - European systems of formal and informal continuing training and lifelong learning with support programmes; - better access to public procurement, especially for businesses working in cooperation, start-ups, networks of businesses (particularly SMEs) and professional associations of engineers; - better access to finance and capital markets; - campaigns to increase the appeal of courses and careers and of professional 	<p>Directive 2013/55/EU² covers the mutual recognition of engineers' professional qualifications. This Directive, which had to be implemented in Member States by 18 January 2016, modernises the mutual recognition regime and will thus facilitate further the recognition of engineer's qualifications throughout the EU. Moreover, the Commission is exploring the feasibility of using the new avenue for recognition as adopted in the amending Directive 2015/33/EU regarding establishment of either common training frameworks or common training tests.</p> <p>Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs³ gives would-be and new entrepreneurs know-how and mentoring on starting and running a business, through exchanges with experienced entrepreneurs in another country. So far around 3 500 exchanges of this type took place. This programme will be expanded further, moving towards</p>

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/9783>.

² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:354:0132:0170:en:PDF>.

³ <http://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/upload/Erasmus%20Entrepreneurs%20Anniversary%20Brochure%20new.pdf>.

<p>qualifications;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support for cross-disciplinary approaches and digital networking; - flexibility and promotion of gender equality; - mutual regulation of professional liability across the single market. 	<p>10 000 new exchanges by 2020.</p> <p>A number of EU funding instruments support the development of skills (the European Social Fund, the Youth Employment Initiative, Erasmus+, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs etc.). They need to be fully exploited to tackle the challenges of skills anticipation, development and recognition. The Commission plans to support scalable quality business-education partnerships as a priority at national and regional level to increase the number of "real-life" work experiences during education and training.</p> <p>The EU Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)¹ was designed to enable people, at any stage of their life, to take part in stimulating learning experiences, as well as developing education and training across Europe. With a budget of nearly EUR 7 billion, the programme, which ran from 2007-2013, funded a range of exchanges, study visits, and networking activities. The activities of LLP continue under the new Erasmus+ programme from 2014-2020.</p> <p>To improve access to public procurement, one key EU policy objective is to open up national public procurement markets to companies from other EU countries, including</p>
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¹http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/llp_en.htm.

²<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=105>.

through the use of joint cross-border procurement. The public procurement reform of 2014 introduced legislative measures to improve SMEs' access to public procurement markets including an encouragement to divide contracts into lots, a limit to the turnover required to participate in a tender procedure and a reduction in documentation requirements.

The programmes COSME and Horizon 2020 together with the European Structural and Investment Funds and a dedicated window under the Investment Plan aim to make access easier for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to access finance in all phases of their lifecycle – creation, expansion, or business transfer.

COSME also aims to create more favourable conditions for the creation of businesses and growth through the reduction of administrative and regulatory burdens, identification and exchange of best practice among national administrations to improve SME policy and analytical tools for better policy.

A stronger ownership and political pledge from all Member States and reinforced partnerships between all relevant stakeholders (education and training providers, social partners, business, employment services, regional and local authorities) are essential to improve the regulatory environment for companies and the skills challenge. In order to support a

	<p>coordinated approach at national level, the Commission continues to assist Member States in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - shaping structural reforms within the European Semester to improve the business environment (SME-tests, streamlined procedures to obtain permits and licenses, e-government etc.), - financial support will be available to countries wishing to involve all relevant stakeholders in the development of comprehensive strategies and action plans about skills. - financing is being provided to national networks to boost dissemination of information on funding opportunities for skills development and support a more coordinated approach to career guidance across different sectors (education, social services, Public Employment Services²).
<p>1.11 The EESC recommends that the Commission take practical steps towards the establishment of a European liberal profession forum, in which engineering associations and professional bodies should be widely represented, and calls for the creation of a European engineering portal where issues such as liability, intellectual property, taxation, pensions, ongoing training and codes of good practice can be addressed.</p>	<p>The needs of liberal professions were addressed in the Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2020¹ that established a working group 'Bolstering the Business of Liberal Professions' in 2013. The main aim of the group is to help overcome the challenges faced by liberal professions. However, such initiatives as a European liberal profession forum and a European engineering portal require the support</p>

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/action-plan/index_en.htm.

	of all stakeholders, including Member States.
<p>1.12 The EESC recommends that the Commission draw up a European code of good engineering practice on the basis of the experience of national organisations of engineers and technicians, providing these professionals with the legal and financial prerequisites for innovative projects, particularly SMEs and R&D operators.</p>	<p>Once again, the roles of stakeholders and Member States are crucial here. A European code of good engineering practice could only be implemented successfully by a well-targeted industry-led initiative with the support of leading Member States in this field.</p>

<p>N°8 Report on Competition Policy 2014 COM(2015) 247 final – EESC 2015/3837 - INT/771 512th Plenary Session – December 2015 Rapporteur: Ms Reine-Claude MADER (GR11-FR) DG COMP - Commissioner VESTAGER</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission Position</p>
<p>1.1. The EESC welcomes the various initiatives taken by the Commission to promote fair competition, which safeguards the interests of economic operators (businesses, consumers, workers).</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the overall positive tone of the Opinion and the general support for strong and effective competition enforcement.</p>
<p>1.3. The EESC does regret, however, that yet again the Commission has failed to adopt a genuine legal mechanism for collective actions that would provide effective enforcement of the right to damages for those affected by anti-competitive practices.</p> <p>3.24. Unlike the Commission, the EESC does not believe that Directive 2014/104/EU of 26 November 2014 or the Recommendation on common principles for collective redress mechanisms in disputes concerning infringements of competition law are capable of providing the necessary collective redress for the rights of those affected by such violations.</p>	<p>The Directive on antitrust damages actions was adopted and entered into force in 2014. Member States are required to implement it by 27 December 2016. The Directive aims to help citizens and companies claim damages if they are victims of an infringement of the EU antitrust rules, such as cartels or abuses of dominant market positions. The Commission is proactively assisting Member States in their implementation efforts.</p> <p>The Commission believes that collective redress is an important element in ensuring that an individual's right to claim damages can be enforced in practice. In the 2013 Recommendation on collective redress, the Commission invited Member States to introduce collective redress mechanisms for compensation in mass harm situations. This covers all policy fields where a breach of EU rules may cause mass</p>

	<p>harm, including the antitrust field. Member States were invited to act by July 2015.</p> <p>The Commission will assess the implementation of the Recommendation on the basis of practical experience by 26 July 2017 at the latest. It will also assess whether any further EU measures on collective redress are necessary.</p>
<p>1.4. The EESC supports the Commission's efforts to publicise the rules and make them transparent, which provides stability for businesses and thus the market too. It wishes to point out in this connection that the practices of the retail sector deserve continued attention.</p>	<p>In October 2014, the Commission published its study, "The Economic Impact of Modern Retail on Choice and Innovation in the EU Food Sector"¹ (the "Study"). The Study contained some important findings concerning the functioning of modern retail.</p> <p>The Commission conducted the follow-up to the Study over 2015, engaging with industry stakeholders to further understand the results. A key question raised by the Study is whether the position that retailers have, in offering their private label, as both customers and competitors of brand manufacturers simultaneously can be used to their advantage, creating an uneven playing field in the wholesale market for groceries. As part of the follow-up to the Study, in 2015 the Commission started looking into whether such practices can reduce innovation available to consumers. More generally, the Commission has been working together with National Competition Authorities</p>

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/competition/publications/KD0214955ENN.pdf>.

	to identify the role competition law may play in addressing procurement practices of retailers and the effects of these practices on consumers.
<p>1.5. The EESC welcomes the impetus given by the Commission to cooperation with national competition authorities (NCAs), which have a key role to play, particularly in terms of prevention and the development of programmes to raise awareness of competition law. It believes that NCAs should have the necessary means to carry out this work.</p>	<p>On 4 November 2015, the Commission launched a public consultation on empowering the national competition authorities (NCAs) to be more effective enforcers¹. The Commission invites feedback from a broad range of stakeholders on potential improvements to guarantee that NCAs (i) have the right tools to detect and sanction violations of the EU competition rules; (ii) have effective leniency programmes that encourage companies to come forward, possibly in several jurisdictions, with evidence of illegal cartels; and (iii) have adequate resources and are sufficiently independent when enforcing EU competition law.</p> <p>Responses to the public consultation could be submitted until 12 February 2016. The Commission will now decide on the basis of the feedback received whether any further action is needed and what form such action will take to ensure that NCAs are truly effective enforcers of the EU competition rules.</p>
<p>1.9. While conscious of the limits of the Commission's action on tax planning, the EESC would like the Commission to continue to take steps to rectify, limit or put an end to fiscal and social distortions</p>	<p>The fight against tax evasion is one of the priorities of the Commission.</p> <p>In March 2015, the Commission endorsed a Tax Transparency Package,</p>

¹ Available at http://ec.europa.eu/competition/consultations/2015_effective_enforcers/index_en.html.

insofar as its powers allow, while ensuring that this does not lead to a race to the bottom.

which aims to make sure that Member States have the information they need in order to protect their tax bases and effectively target companies that try to escape paying their fair share of taxes. This first step was followed in June 2015 by an Action Plan for fair and effective taxation, and in January 2016 by the Anti-Tax Avoidance Package, adopted as the first part of the Commission's 2016 Corporate Tax Package.

Within DG Competition, the Task Force on Tax Planning, created in 2013, continues to investigate unfair tax competition. With a view to ensure a level playing field, the Commission is looking at the compliance with EU State aid rules of certain tax practices in some Member States in the context of aggressive tax planning by multinationals. In 2014, the Commission opened four formal investigations where it raised concerns that tax rulings may entail State aid issues. These investigations concern rulings for Apple in Ireland, Starbucks in the Netherlands, Fiat Finance & Trade in Luxembourg and Amazon in Luxembourg. Two of these cases (Fiat and Starbucks) have been concluded on 21 October 2015 with negative decisions with recovery. In February 2015, the Commission launched an in-depth investigation into the Belgian excess profit system, which was concluded with a negative decision ordering recovery on 11 January 2016, and on 3 December 2015, the Commission opened a formal probe into Luxembourg's tax treatment of

	<p>McDonalds. At the same time, the Commission is pursuing its inquiry into tax rulings practices in all EU Member States.</p> <p>The proposal on automatic exchange of information on tax rulings, adopted as part of the 2015 Tax Transparency Package, has already been adopted by the Council in December 2015 and will enter into force in January 2017.</p> <p>The January 2016 tax package includes a host of measures, among which two legislative proposals to combat aggressive tax planning, and to implement the OECD BEPS Actions in the EU. The package is currently under negotiation in Council.</p>
<p>1.13. The EESC calls for every effort to be made to provide free access to digital infrastructure so as to enable rural areas to develop. This objective justifies an approach which dovetails private investment and public support.</p> <p>4.1.9. However, the EESC regards as insufficiently ambitious the Commission's goal of achieving blanket fast broadband coverage (30Mbps) for services and the adoption of ultra-fast broadband (100 Mbps) services for 50% of Europeans by 2020.</p>	<p>One major building-block for a well-functioning Digital Single Market is a high-speed communication infrastructure. By 2020, the Digital Agenda aims at achieving full coverage of fast broadband and adoption of ultra-fast broadband by 50% of Europeans. The Commission is aware that achieving these objectives is challenging and that an obstacle to achieve these objectives is the significant "funding gap", i.e. investment of private operators alone will not yield the desired results but State involvement remains essential to extend broadband coverage in areas where there is no incentive for commercial operators to invest.</p> <p>In the area of competition policy, the Broadband Guidelines, adopted in 2013, together with the General Block Exemption Regulation, continues to play</p>

	<p>an important role in closing this funding gap and in ensuring that publicly funded networks do not crowd out private investments.</p>
<p>1.15. Finally, in the EESC's view, it is essential to follow up and assess any policy measures taken.</p>	<p>In May 2015, the Commission issued a Communication "Better Regulation for better results - An EU agenda"¹ aiming to make EU policy-making more transparent and accountable, as well as ensuring that policies are based on the best available evidence and making them more effective. This Communication sets out a series of actions which demonstrate the Commission's renewed commitment to apply Better Regulation to its everyday work. The principles of the Better Regulation agenda equally apply to all Commission services including the commitment to systematically evaluate whether implemented policies have reached their objectives.</p>
<p>3.4. The EESC notes, as the Commission states, that the number of users of smart mobile devices is increasing. Innovation is crucial here, but the "rules of the game" must be drawn up for operators, they must be widely known and should be transparent. The Committee believes that the ubiquity of major international groups, such as Google, has given rise to the risk that a dominant position might be abused and that it is important to enforce the existing rules to allow new operators to enter the market.</p>	<p>The Commission is committed to ensuring effective competition in the markets concerned so that innovation can flourish. In April 2015, the Commission sent a Statement of Objections to Google alleging that the company had abused a dominant position in the markets for general internet search services by systematically favouring its own comparison shopping product in its general search results. The Commission continues to investigate Google's conduct with regard to other specialised</p>

¹ COM(2015) 215 final.

	<p>search services as well. In April 2015, the Commission opened proceedings with regard to Android, and is examining Google's conduct with regard to a range of products in the mobile space. In April 2016, the Commission sent a Statement of Objections to Google informing it of the Commission's preliminary view that the company has, in breach of EU antitrust rules, abused its dominant position by imposing restrictions on Android device manufacturers and mobile network operators.</p>
<p>4.25. However, the EESC questions the assertion that, while wholesale electricity prices have fallen thanks to increased competition, this has not often led to a reduction in the overall level of prices for final consumers.</p>	<p>The Commission "Communication on energy prices and costs in Europe"¹ of 29 January 2014 indeed stated that the fall in wholesale prices had not translated into a reduction in the energy element of retail prices. The Market Monitoring Report 2015 published by the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) on 30 November 2015 found quantitative evidence that in the period 2011-2014 the decrease in the wholesale price was not followed by a similar decrease in the energy component of the retail price. The Communication also included some qualitative assessment indicating that the relationship between wholesale and retail prices could be cut by high levels of market concentration and that universal retail price regulation applied in some Member States could be detrimental to competition in the retail</p>

¹ COM(2014) 21 final.

	<p>markets, as it discourages competitors from market entry and investment and might therefore contribute to reducing the responsiveness of retail prices.</p> <p>Achieving a strong single energy market is one of the main priorities of the Commission. On 25 February 2015, the Commission published a new energy policy framework: the Energy Union Framework Strategy¹. The Strategy aims at addressing three long-standing challenges in the energy sector: security of supply, sustainability and competitiveness.</p> <p>Energy markets are currently facing significant challenges: incomplete market integration and high prices are among the most important. Competition policy is an important part of the policy mix that can address these challenges. Competition enforcement notably ensures that companies do not maintain or reinstate barriers to competition that have been removed by legislation liberalising the sector and preventing dominant companies from excluding competitors and exploiting their dominance to the detriment of consumers. Competition enforcement thus leads to opening markets, creating a level playing field between competitors and ultimately promoting investment and innovation.</p>
4.4.2. The EESC appreciates that these	The Commission has decided to give the

¹ COM(2015) 80 final.

policies signal openness towards the intellectual professions and recognises the crucial role Europe's professionals play in growth by providing, sector by sector, the vital contribution of knowledge needed to solve the complex problems faced by the public and businesses. The EESC also recommends that the Commission continues, and if possible redoubles, efforts in this direction.

Single Market a new boost with a number of ambitious and pragmatic actions focused on three main areas, among them the area of creating additional opportunities for consumers, professionals and businesses. In its Communication "Upgrading the Single Market: more opportunities for people and business"¹ of 28 October 2015, the Commission presented a roadmap to unleash the full potential of the Single Market.

The Commission will improve the opportunities for businesses and professionals to be more mobile across borders and, in particular, facilitate cross-border provision of business services, construction and other services that generate growth. Taken together, these actions will make it easier for companies and professionals to access new markets, allowing them to grow.

The Commission monitors the implementation of the Service Directive and is working on the implementation of the Single Market Strategy.

¹ COM(2015) 550 final.

<p>N°9 Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2003/87/EC to enhance cost-effective emission reductions and low-carbon investments COM(2015) 337 final – EESC 2015/4053 – NAT/675 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Antonello PEZZINI (GRI-IT) DG CLIMA – Commissioner ARIAS CAÑETE</p>	
Points of the EESC opinion considered essential	Commission position
<p>1.6. / 5.5.1. The EESC recommends the establishment of a proper framework of rules, particularly regarding free allocation levels, carbon leakage admissibility, the review of benchmarking parameters and compensation for costs passed on to electricity prices, so as to secure 100% free allocation and full compensation for indirect costs in all Member States for the 10% most efficient plants in sectors exposed to a high risk of carbon leakage.</p>	<p>The Commission's proposal for revision of the EU Emission Trading System (ETS) is based on the strategic guidance of the European Council on 2030 Climate and Energy Policy Framework (October 2014). In particular, the European Council stated that free allocation to industry should continue after 2020, most efficient installations should face no undue carbon costs, windfall profits should be avoided, and existing measures to compensate for indirect emissions should also remain from 2021 onwards. These guiding principles were used for design and evaluation of policy options in the Impact Assessment, as analytical background to the current proposal.</p>
<p>6.4. The EESC also considers that the cross-sectoral correction factor should be abolished. A poorly-calculated correction factor would generate uncertainty as to free allocation and would leave those plants at greatest risk liable to undue costs.</p>	<p>Considering the amount of free allocation is limited, the ETS Directive contains a clause on the cross-sectoral correction factor to avoid over-subscription of the free allocation budget also beyond 2020.</p> <p>The Commission proposal entails a number of changes to the existing</p>

	rules, aiming to significantly reduce the likelihood and magnitude of a correction factor beyond 2020.
6.9 The EESC takes the view that part of the Market Stability Reserve should be used to support the phasing out of sectors removed from the carbon leakage list.	The rules of the agreed Market Stability Reserve (MSR) foresee a block transfer of unallocated allowances into the MSR in 2020 to ensure the orderly functioning of the European carbon market. Based on the Impact Assessment, the Commission's proposal for ETS revision includes using a share of allowances for free allocation and support to industrial innovation. However, using more of unallocated allowances would severely undermine the purpose and impact of the MSR.
6.10. The Committee would urge that the measures planned for small plants with emissions below 25 000 t CO ₂ be extended to plants with emissions lower than 50 000 t CO ₂ , which account for approximately 75% of ETS installations at European level, but only 5% of total emissions.	The Commission's proposal foresees the renewed option for Member States to opt-out small emitters for the period 2021-2030. The threshold for inclusion of installations from EU ETS is based on capacity rather than emissions, which are far more variable. Excluding such installations from the EU ETS is subject to equivalent measures, which must be taken by the Member States applying to make use of the opt-out to ensure this does not affect the environmental integrity. Even if installations are no longer covered by the EU ETS, they must still monitor and report their emissions.

<p>N°10 Engaged universities shaping Europe (own-initiative opinion) EESC 2015/2595 - SOC/524 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Joost VAN IERSEL (GRI-NL) DG EAC – Commissioner NAVRACSICS</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>General assessment</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the EESC opinion ‘Engaged universities shaping Europe’ and finds many of the recommendations to be valuable contributions to the current debate on the shape of future higher education in Europe. For the Commission, the opinion comes in a very timely manner, as a revision of the modernisation agenda is currently being discussed. Many of the recommendations reflect considerations that have emerged during the ongoing consultation with stakeholders.</p>
<p>1.5., 4.1.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that higher education institutions can play a strong role as regional innovators to support the development of local communities, to help create jobs and growth and stimulate a democratic, inclusive dialogue. Being co-drivers for growth and addressing societal needs as part of the core mission of higher education institutions requires strong cooperation with external stakeholders as highlighted in the opinion.</p> <p>Higher education institutions furthermore play an essential part in supporting social cohesion. Throughout</p>

	<p>recent years, a more diverse student body has entered higher education institutions; opening up access has seen great improvement. Widening access to ensure that the student body mirrors the overall population even better remains a priority at European level. The Commission has launched a study examining admission systems and their impact on higher education outcomes, including how they cater for receiving non-traditional students and supporting a diverse student body.</p>
2.10., 5.13.	<p>The Commission agrees that new technologies and digitalisation force higher education institutions to adapt and fine-tune methodologies. Following the publication in October 2015 of the Commission's study into the Changing Pedagogical Landscape, the Commission is following up on its conclusions that barriers to digital learning must be removed; and on its specific recommendations covering a range of areas, including pedagogical training, recognition and quality assurance. This study follows on from the report by the Commission's High-Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education in October 2014, which called on policy-makers and higher education institutions to develop all-encompassing strategies on digital learning. It is expected that the challenges and opportunities offered by digitalisation will feature strongly in the renewed modernisation agenda for higher education.</p>
5.3., 5.11., 5.12.	<p>Another element that is expected to feature in the renewed modernisation</p>

	<p>agenda is how inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral approaches are essential to fostering innovation, and in ensuring that graduates are equipped with transferable skills, in addition to their academic specialisation. This requires that the education, research and innovation functions of universities be mutually reinforcing. The Commission is exploring this area as part of the review of the modernisation agenda for higher education, and is cooperating with Council Presidencies on facilitating discussion in various fora.</p>
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<p>N°11 CAP simplification (exploratory opinion) EESC 2015/4293 - NAT/672 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Seamus BOLAND (GRIII-IE) DG AGRI – Commissioner HOGAN</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>Inspection and possible fines must be proportionate to the amount of money received by the beneficiary, the reasons for non-compliance and the willingness to take corrective actions. ... [reduce] disproportionality between large reductions of support for even minor infringements.</p>	<p>The Commission has already introduced a number of changes to the administrative penalties system, including a system of preventive preliminary cross-checks as part of the application process, aimed at alerting farmers to errors so that they can avoid reductions and a number of provisions aimed at reducing the rate of controls and improving sample selection.</p> <p>Commissioner Hogan has already announced the intention of the Commission to introduce (for cases of area over-declaration) further simplification by introducing: a) a simplified penalties system, without categories and with a reduced penalty level; b) A "yellow card" system whereby first-time offenders will pay penalties reduced by 50%.</p> <p>Consequently, the Commission has already taken, and plans to take more, action in order to improve proportionality of the sanctions system. This said, one of the three guiding principles of the simplification exercise is that it should not compromise the sound financial management of EU</p>

	funds.
Application of greening measures must take into account unexpected factors such as weather conditions, drought or other such events that make the measures impossible to implement.	The existing legislative framework already contains provisions to cover for situations of force majeure.
After implementation of a flat rate scheme in the context of direct payments, the complex system of payment entitlements should be reviewed	A change to the payment entitlements system would require a substantive amendment to the basic acts. Even in that case, it is not clear that the proposal can be tackled in the context of the simplification exercise or whether, given the extent of its potential impact, it should not rather be part of a possible more far-reaching review of the CAP.
Temporary grassland should retain the status of arable land, regardless of how long it is used as grassland.	Permanent grassland needs to be maintained in view of its environmental importance. As a matter of legal certainty, a time threshold must exist beyond which grassland is considered permanent and no longer temporary.
The current definition of an "active farmer" must not disadvantage farmers and should be based on the fact that land eligible for aid is being used by the farmer for agricultural purposes.	The Commission does not consider that the current definition disadvantages farmers. It shares the opinion that any future definition should not do so either and for this purpose the criteria used should be effective in making sure that the support targets real farmers.
Simplification must be compatible with broad policy objectives such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the environment, - food safety, 	The Commission fully shares this opinion and will do all in its power to ensure that simplification of the CAP is not in conflict with any of these objectives.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - food availability, - cohesion, - protection of the Union’s financial interests, and - promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development. 	
<p>Measures to ease the access by young farmers into the Young Farmers Scheme need to be explored and introduced immediately. Access of young people to agriculture should be supported.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that supporting access of young people to agriculture is a very important objective and is willing to examine any simplification proposals that would render such access easier.</p> <p>Indeed, a simplification of the rules relating to the Young Farmers' Scheme giving further discretion to Member States to facilitate the installation of young farmers was announced by Commissioner Hogan in November 2015.</p> <p>This adds to the top up of 25% of basic payments to Young Farmers under Pillar I, demonstrating the continued committed support to young farmers.</p>

<p>N°12 Action Plan on fairer corporate taxation COM(2015)302 final – EESC 2015/2961 - ECO/383 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Petru SORIN DANDEA (GRII-RO) Corapporteur: Mr Paulo BARROS VALE (GRI-PT) DG TAXUD – Commissioner MOSCOVICI</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>The EESC welcomes the publication of the Action Plan and expresses its support for the Commission in combating aggressive tax planning which erodes Member States' tax bases and promotes unfair competition.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the European Economic and Social Committee's broad support for the aims of the common consolidated corporate tax base (CCCTB) and is pleased that it shares the view underpinning the announced re-launch of this Commission proposal, that the CCCTB will contribute to achieving revenue stability, a stronger Single Market and a fair and level-playing field for businesses.</p>
<p>The EESC endorses the introduction of a compulsory CCCTB and recommends that the Commission assess whether the CCCTB should be applied in the future to all companies so that Member States would not have to operate two different tax bases.</p>	<p>The Commission aims at presenting the re-launched CCCTB before the end of 2016. As announced, this will be a staged approach, consisting of a first step where Member States are meant to secure the common tax base (CCTB) and a second which will provide for consolidation (CCCTB). Otherwise, the scope of the reviewed proposal is yet to be agreed. In this regard, the Commission takes note of the Committee's recommendation for further exploring the option to include all companies.</p>
<p>The EESC considers that the mechanism for cross-border loss relief, which the Commission wishes to introduce until</p>	<p>A cross-border loss relief regime is conceived as an integral part of the first step of the Commission's CCCTB work</p>

<p>consolidation is adopted, should not affect the right of a Member State to tax the profits resulting from an activity carried out on its territory.</p>	<p>(i.e. CCTB) in order to balance defensive measures with a guarantee of a better business environment. The Commission is currently looking at this possible regime. Should this option be agreed, the Commission would make sure that it is compliant with existing EU law requirements (i.e. treaty freedoms) and with the general principles of EU law (e.g. subsidiarity). Finally, it has to be noted that this cross-border loss relief regime would be automatically cancelled when the full CCCTB enters into force.</p>
<p>The EESC is pleased that the Commission has published a list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions. The Committee reiterates the proposal it made in previous opinions, that EU rules should include sanctions for companies that continue to run their business through tax havens and thereby avoid having to pay tax within the tax systems of the Member States in which they operate.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note that the Committee's opinion is in line with the Commission's goal of assessing and listing third countries for tax purposes. This would not only have a stronger deterrent effect for "tax havens" but would also ensure greater clarity and legal certainty for businesses and the EU's international partners.</p> <p>The Commission's Anti-Tax Avoidance Package adopted on 28 January 2016 includes a new External Strategy for Effective Taxation that will provide an EU framework to assess and list third countries and to apply common defensive measures where necessary.</p>
<p>The EESC recommends that, following the adoption of the CCCTB directive and the introduction of consolidation, the Commission carry out an impact assessment of the new rules. Should this assessment show there has been no decrease in profit shifting to Member States with lower tax rates, the EESC proposes that targeted complementary</p>	<p>The Commission shares EESC's view that complementary measures to the CCCTB should be adopted in order to tackle tax avoidance and profit shifting.</p> <p>To this end, the Anti-Tax Avoidance Package referred to also includes an Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive which reflects</p>

<p>measures be adopted.</p>	<p>discussions in Council, recommendations from the European Parliament and the outcomes of the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) project.</p>
<p>The EESC recommends to the Commission that, in the context of reviewing the mandate of the Platform for Tax Good Governance, it also considers including among its members representatives of the European social partners.</p>	<p>The mandate of current members of the Platform expires in April 2016. The Commission is therefore calling for applications with a view to selecting up to 15 representatives of business, civil society and tax practitioner organisations. However, the Commission takes due note of the Committee's recommendation and will take it into account for further consideration.</p>

<p>N°13 European Agenda on Migration COM(2015) 240 final – EESC 2015/4319 - SOC/525 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Stefano MALLIA (GRI-MT) Corapporteur: Mr Cristian PÎRVULESCU (GRIII-RO) DG HOME – Commissioner AVRAMOPOULOS</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>1.3. The EESC believes that the current situation requires the EU to establish a truly common European asylum system based on harmonised procedures throughout the EU. This includes uniform asylum status and mutual recognition of asylum decisions, shared responsibility and efforts with respect to relocation and resettlement, and a revised Dublin Regulation. There is a need for robust, solidarity-based systems of burden-sharing, especially a permanent, fair and binding system for allocating those seeking protection between all EU countries. In addition, long-term solutions in the event that mass migrations continues or occurs again in the future must also be sought.</p>	<p>On 4 May 2016 the Commission presented a first package of legislative proposals to reform the Common European Asylum System. One proposal concerns the recast of the Dublin Regulation, to create a fairer, more efficient and more sustainable system for allocating asylum applications among Member States. The basic criteria for sharing responsibility remain the same, but are made more efficient. A new corrective allocation mechanism will ensure no Member State is left with a disproportionate share of asylum applications. While the Commission on 4 May 2016 also proposed Regulations on Eurodac and the European Union Agency for Asylum, the second package of legislative proposals will be adopted later in 2016, addressing asylum procedures, qualifications and reception conditions.</p>
<p>1.11. The appropriate financial resources must be raised in a joint effort by the entire international community. It should be clarified in the process that expenditure incurred by Member States in connection with the reception and integration of asylum-</p>	<p>According to the Treaty, budgetary discipline is assessed against reference values that do not differentiate amid different kinds of expenditure. Nevertheless, the flexibility embedded in the Pact allows for accommodating</p>

<p>seekers and refugees is not long-term, structural expenditure and should not, therefore, be included in the calculation of structural budget deficits. The necessary resources must not be raised at the expense of existing funds for social objectives in the EU. This would jeopardise public consent from some sections of the population.</p>	<p>the incremental exceptional spending linked to unusual events outside the control of the government, both under the preventive and the corrective arm of the Pact, provided certain conditions are met.</p> <p>The Commission is willing to use these provisions in relation to the budgetary impact of the exceptional inflow of refugees. It will monitor the situation on the basis of observed data as provided by the authorities of the concerned Member States to determine eligible amounts. This will be applied on a case-by-case basis, while ensuring consistent and equal treatment among Member States.</p> <p>Regarding European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), a suspension of commitments or payments under Article 23 (9) will only happen in case of ‘non-effective action’ by the Member State within the corrective arm (Excessive Deficit Procedure) of the Stability and Growth Pact. Given that the deviations from the budgetary targets related to exceptional expenditure from the refugee crisis will not lead to any stepping up in the Excessive Deficit Procedure, there will not be any case of possible suspension of the ESIF linked to an exceptional expenditure in the context of the refugee crisis.</p>
<p>3.1.3. So far an agreement has been reached on the relocation of 160 000 refugees in the EU. The swift implementation of this agreement would enable much valuable</p>	<p>As indicated above, the Commission presented on 4 May 2016, a recast of the Dublin Regulation that will allow the EU to better manage asylum</p>

<p>experience to be gathered with a view to developing long-term solutions in the event that mass migration continues or occurs again in the future. The EESC considers that more ambition is needed. The global mass movement of people will not subside for many years to come.</p>	<p>applications, including in cases of mass influx. The proposal establishes inter alia a fairer system based on solidarity: with a corrective allocation mechanism and takes into account resettlement efforts. The Commission's three reports on relocation and resettlement, with the latest one adopted on 18 May (COM(2016) 360 final), provide an updated state of play and assess actions undertaken to deliver on the recommendations made to accelerate the implementation of the relocation and resettlement schemes.</p>
<p>3.1.6. The EESC also welcomes the increase in EU funding for Frontex, EASO and Europol in 2015 and the EUR 600 million increase for the three agencies in 2016 to help the most affected states. These efforts need to be complemented by an effective return policy. Currently, only about 38% of those who have been found not to be in need of protection have been returned to their countries.</p>	<p>The EUR 600 million increase of Heading 3 for 2016 further complements the prior reinforcement of EUR 123 million already included in the Draft Budget 2016. These additional financial means are being used for emergency assistance for the most affected Member States, strengthening of the Internal Security Fund (ISF) (first reception) and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) (return, relocation) and strengthening of the operational capacity and human resources of agencies (EUR 85.6 million).</p> <p>The Commission agrees that the effectiveness of the EU system to return irregular migrants must be enhanced. The EU Action Plan on return (COM(2015) 453 final) defines the immediate and mid-term measures to be taken in this regard. In addition, the proposal for a European Border and Coast Guard (COM(2015) 671 final) foresees the creation of a European Return Office that will work to</p>

	effectively return illegally staying third country nationals.
3.1.7. The EU needs to increasingly link aid to developing countries to internal reforms as well as foster effective cooperation on migration issues, particularly legal migration (including temporary movement/visas) and return policy. It is however important for Member States to honour their commitment to assign 0.7 % of gross national income (GNI) to development aid.	The Commission set out a strategy for increased cooperation with third countries and for mobilising all available tools to incentivise our partners to cooperate on migration, including return and readmission. That not only includes policy tools relating to home affairs such as visas, but also external tools, involving development assistance or trade. EU funding to support Member States in strengthening their return capacities, as well as to facilitate return operations, is also available under the AMIF.
3.1.15. The EESC fully supports the immediate setting up of hotspots. However, these must be fully staffed and given all the resources required to enable them to function effectively. In places such as Italy and Greece, where thousands of migrants arrive every day, only a significant pooling of financial and physical resources can prevent total chaos.	The Commission agrees that the hotspots have to be fully rolled out without delay, adapted as required to changing circumstances. Significant resources have already been granted to Frontex, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and Europol to strengthen their operational capacity. The Commission invites Member States to make available the necessary experts to provide support to Greece and Italy.
3.2.3. The EESC believes that one of the principal goals of the Agenda is to launch an EU migration policy which makes legal migration possible, while at the same time stimulating the effective integration of migrants. The EESC is waiting for the first legislative and policy proposals in these areas, and stands ready to support the Commission in its efforts to develop these proposals.	The Commission will take initiatives in the field of legal migration in 2016. In particular, it will propose a revision of the Blue Card Directive to improve the attractiveness of the EU for highly skilled third country nationals. A "fitness check" on legal migration legislation will also be launched. On integration, an Action Plan will be proposed.

<p>3.2.7. Great priority should be given to organising legal migration and visa policy, the digitalisation of the process, the recognition of qualifications and obtaining educational mobility.</p>	<p>See comment on point 3.2.3.</p> <p>The Commission will also contribute to the implementation of the "La Valetta Action Plan" on Migration and mobility and promote better assessment, recognition and use of foreign qualifications, notably in the frame of the New Skills Agenda for Europe to be adopted in 2016.</p>
<p>3.2.8. The EU should be more involved in the management of returns and support for reintegration measures. The pilot project on returning to Pakistan and Bangladesh is of limited relevance to the current emergency situation. The EESC strongly recommends the planning and implementation of similar projects, with proper financing and institutional support.</p>	<p>See comment on point 3.1.7.</p> <p>Return management and reintegration measures are supported under the AMIF 2014-2020, building on the European Return Fund 2008-2013.</p>
<p>3.3.3. Furthermore, the EESC recommends that the Commission make efforts to provide Member States with more resources through the partnership agreements concerning structural funds to channel more ESF and ERDF funds towards managing the migration flows and integration effort. NGOs and organisations involved on the ground should be prime recipients of such funds. These should be over and above the funds currently being provided under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.</p>	<p>The Commission has been assisting Member States in order to enhance the synergies and complementarity among the most relevant EU Funds (AMIF, ISF, European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and it stands ready to rapidly examine and adopt programmes modifications for 2014-2020. EU Funds may respond to both short and long-term needs of migrants. Effective and efficient implementation of the partnership principle is instrumental and the Commission uses all practical (bilateral visits, letters to Member States), structural (social dialogue) and legal possibilities (regulatory framework of the Funds) to fully implement it and to encourage the Member States to reinforce this principle at all levels.</p>

	<p>Some Member States, such as Greece and Italy, have already allocated structural funds for 2014-2020 to reception and integration of migrants. The ESF, as the main EU Fund for investing in people, can support a wide range of activities to facilitate the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in the labour market, through funding measures such as training, language courses, counselling, coaching, vocational training and employment measures. With the exception of some measures – education for children and vocational training in some Member States - the ESF can only support asylum seekers once they have access to the labour market.</p>
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<p>N°14 Proposal for establishing a crisis relocation mechanism COM(2015) 450 final – EESC 2015/5408 - SOC/526 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr Cristian PÎRVULESCU (GR11-RO) DG HOME – Commissioner AVRAMOPOULOS</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>1.7. The Commission and the other EU Institutions must actively support the governments of the Member States so as to provide proper conditions and prospects for integrating the relocated asylum applicants. In this context, it should, inter alia, be clarified that expenditure incurred by the Member States in connection with the reception and integration of asylum-seekers and refugees is not long-term, structural expenditure and should not, therefore, be included in the calculation of structural budget deficits.</p>	<p>According to the Treaty, budgetary discipline is assessed against reference values that do not differentiate amid different kinds of expenditure. Nevertheless, the flexibility embedded in the Pact allows for accommodating the incremental exceptional spending linked to unusual events outside the control of the government, both under the preventive and the corrective arm of the Pact, provided certain conditions are met.</p> <p>The Commission is willing to use these provisions in relation to the budgetary impact of the exceptional inflow of refugees. It will monitor the situation on the basis of observed data as provided by the authorities of the concerned Member States to determine eligible amounts. This will be applied on a case-by-case basis, while ensuring consistent and equal treatment among the Member States.</p>
<p>2.9. The crisis relocation mechanism is a concrete example of cooperation based on solidarity and responsibility. However, the EESC wishes to have this mechanism and other similar initiatives included as part of a</p>	<p>The Commission agrees that there is a need to re-think the system for the allocation of asylum-seekers among Member States in the spirit of solidarity and responsibility. With this</p>

<p>general strategy in order to ensure coherence and efficiency. In particular, there is a need for robust, solidarity-based systems of burden-sharing, especially a permanent, fair and binding system for allocating those seeking protection between all EU countries. The Commission's "European Agenda on Migration" is a positive step in this direction.</p>	<p>aim, the Commission is working towards the full implementation of the European Agenda on Migration. The proposal for a new Dublin Regulation mentioned above introduces an automatically triggered corrective allocation mechanism. Depending on the results of the discussions on this proposal, the Commission could consider withdrawing the September 2015 proposal on the permanent crisis relocation mechanism, which had a similar objective.</p>
<p>3.1 Any Member State that does not take part in the mechanism should explain its reasons. If the motivation is primarily financial or due to lack of preparation for receiving the asylum applicants, provision should be made for some advance financial support.</p>	<p>The Commission proposal already states that a Member State notifying the Commission that it is temporarily unable to take part, in full or in part, in the relocation of applicants, must give duly justified reasons compatible with the fundamental values of the Union enshrined in Article 2 TFEU. Financial support to Member States for strengthening and developing their asylum systems and ensuring sufficient preparation for receiving asylum applicants is provided through separate instruments, in particular the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), channelled through shared management.</p>
<p>3.3. To determine that a crisis exists, the Commission would look at whether the situation is such that a Member State with a "well prepared asylum system" is still unable to handle the situation. How is this defined? What are the criteria for describing an asylum system as "well prepared"? The proposal gives some criteria the Commission might consider, however</p>	<p>An asylum system is considered well prepared if it is functioning in line with all relevant aspects of the EU asylum acquis, taking into account the size of the Member State concerned. In making this assessment, the Commission shall take into account a number of stated criteria. These criteria are not exhaustive as there is a need to</p>

<p>they are flexible and are described as "inter alia".</p>	<p>allow flexibility to cater for any type of crisis situation occurring anywhere in the EU at any time in the future.</p>
<p>3.4. The proposal is not specific enough as regards matching the preferences of the beneficiary Member State, the Member State of relocation and the applicants. It is not clear how it will work in practice.</p>	<p>The Commission's proposal already includes a description as to how Member States may indicate preferences and in what context the Member State of relocation should consider such preferences.</p> <p>The proposal for a new Dublin Regulation mentioned above introduces an automatically triggered corrective allocation mechanism. Depending on the results of the discussions on this proposal, the Commission could consider withdrawing the September 2015 proposal on the permanent crisis relocation mechanism, which had a similar objective.</p>
<p>3.5. It is recommended that relevant information and counselling be available to the applicants, provided by the authorities in beneficiary Member States and the liaison officers of the Member State of relocation.</p>	<p>Firstly, the general rules set out in the asylum acquis on the provision of information and counselling of applicants for international protection apply also in respect of applicants who could benefit from relocation. Secondly, the Commission's proposal already specifies the right of the applicant to receive information on the relocation procedure. The experience gained in the implementation of the temporary emergency relocation schemes is currently giving further insights into how this should be working in practice, for example through provision of specific pre-</p>

	departure assistance, including cultural orientation sessions.
<p>3.6. It is not clear how the Member State of relocation is encouraged to properly receive and integrate the relocated applicants. The state of infrastructure, the availability of services, e.g. medical or educational, and financial allocations will influence the willingness of the applicants to be relocated to a specific country. The Commission and the other EU Institutions must actively support the governments of the Member States so as to provide the proper conditions and prospects for integrating the relocated applicants.</p>	<p>Once relocated, the Member State of relocation becomes responsible for assessing the asylum application in accordance with the Common European Asylum System, including the provisions of the Reception Conditions Directive. The Commission, however, agrees that reception conditions continue to vary considerably between Member States, leading to secondary movements and 'asylum shopping' with a disproportionate burden falling on a few Member States. Ensuring full and coherent implementation of the Common European Asylum System is therefore a priority under the European Agenda on Migration. The EU is also providing financial support to Member States under AMIF to ensure proper conditions and prospects for integrating the relocated applicants.</p>
<p>3.7. The proposal needs to be more specific in this respect and outline a procedure for evaluating and encouraging the development of asylum infrastructure and services in all Member States.</p>	<p>The European Agenda on Migration sets out that a new systematic monitoring process is needed to ensure full and coherent implementation of the Common European Asylum System. The Commission is assessing how such a system could be implemented taking into account the experience of the evaluation and monitoring of the Schengen acquis.</p>
<p>3.8. The system must to some extent accommodate the preferences of asylum seekers for specific Member States of relocation. The preferences must be linked</p>	<p>According to the Commission's proposal, specific account should be given to the specific qualifications and characteristics of the applicants</p>

<p>to clear and demonstrable prospects for successful integration (resident family members, knowledge of language, and previous links to the country such as studies or business).</p>	<p>concerned, such as their language skills and other individual indications based on demonstrated family, cultural or social ties which could facilitate their integration into the Member State of relocation.</p>
<p>3.9. "Cultural ties" are mentioned as a factor to be taken into account when relocating a person to a Member State. The EESC considers that this criterion should not be used to justify the rejection of asylum seekers on the basis of their religion.</p>	<p>It is clear from the Commission's proposal that cultural ties cannot be used to justify the rejection of asylum seekers on the basis of their religion as Member States of relocation may only indicate their preferences for applicants with due respect of the principle of non-discrimination. Preferences are also only indicative and not binding, rejections of candidates for relocation can only happen on grounds related to national security public order or application of exclusion clauses under the Qualification Directive.</p>
<p>3.10. The proposal fails to specify how the scheme will work for countries like Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), which have clear accession prospects and are experiencing a significant influx of migrants and asylum seekers.</p>	<p>The scheme proposed by the Commission does not apply to Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as they are not EU Member States.</p>

<p>N°15 EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015-2020) COM(2015) 285 final – EESC 2015/3940 - REX/452 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Ms Brenda KING (GRI-UK) DG HOME – Commissioner AVRAMOPOULOS</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>1.2. The EESC supports the Action Plan's efforts to disrupt organised criminal networks through intelligence-led and financial investigations, to put an end to money laundering and to confiscate the assets of illicit activities; however it strongly recommends that the Plan adopts a more balanced and comprehensive approach by detailing how the EU will protect and assist those who are smuggled.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the favourable opinion of the Committee on the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling and thanks the Committee for the relevant observations made on its content and implementation. Regarding protecting and assisting those who are smuggled, the Commission will launch a consultation during 2016 to assess the possible revision of Directive 2004/81/EC on residence permits issued to victims of trafficking in human beings and to smuggled migrants cooperating with authorities.</p>
<p>1.6. The EU must ensure that the Member States make more harmonised, coherent, independent and flexible use of humanitarian visas, as set out in the Common Visa Code.</p>	<p>The common visa policy and in particular the Visa Code covers intended short-stays (90/180 days) and is therefore not the appropriate legal instrument to cover the situation of persons who intend to stay for a longer period of time, as is the case for persons with long-term protection needs.</p>
<p>1.9. Given Europe's challenges with sluggish growth, an ageing and declining population as well as labour</p>	<p>The Commission will shortly present a proposal for a recast of the Blue Card Directive, to make the EU more</p>

<p>shortages, it is also important to link EU migration policies with labour migration and integration policies as part of the European labour market, in light of ample evidence of migration as a vital factor of economic recovery and development in Europe.</p>	<p>competitive to attract highly-skilled third country nationals.</p> <p>Consideration will also be given to developing an EU policy on how to better attract innovative entrepreneurs to the EU.</p> <p>The Commission will also launch an assessment and evaluation of the possible gaps and inconsistencies in the current legal migration acquis. This assessment will establish possible future needs and could, if deemed necessary, pave the way for a simplification and streamlining of EU rules.</p> <p>The Commission intends to step up its action on integration of third country nationals by proposing a new strategy that will take the form of an EU Action Plan on integration, consisting of concrete actions to be undertaken at EU level to support Member States in their integration efforts. While the proposed actions will apply to all migrants, particular attention will be paid to the challenges arising from the current refugee crisis.</p>
<p>1.10. The EESC agrees that the returns policy within the EU needs to be improved and reminds the Commission of its numerous recommendations that the human rights of asylum seekers should be respected at all times.</p>	<p>The Commission agrees on the need to have a comprehensive return policy. The EU Action Plan on return adopted in September 2015 pursues this aim. The implementation of the actions will be compliant with international human right standards, in particular the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Convention for</p>

	<p>the Protection of Human rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol and with the principle of non-refoulement, as guaranteed in the applicable EU legislation.</p>
<p>4.2. The EESC notes that while there is a distinction made between migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, no distinction is made between migrants and asylum seekers. The EESC recommends that all people making the perilous journey to Europe should be treated as refugees in accordance with the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol, until they are proven otherwise.</p>	<p>The Commission takes note of the Committee's observation that those currently entering the EU as irregular migrants should be treated as refugees. The Commission's view is that the current mixed migration flow to Europe (which includes economic migrants) is of a nature that referring to all irregular migrants as refugees would be inaccurate. The Action Plan therefore refers to those smuggled as migrants, which includes refugees.</p>
<p>4.4.5. The EESC believes that the most effective way to provide assistance while weakening smuggling networks is to limit those seeking their services by providing alternative, legal means to travel to Europe from third countries in Europe's neighbourhood regions. This way the fundamental rights as provided for in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights will be safeguarded.</p>	<p>The Commission shares the Committee's view that migrant smuggling networks can be weakened if fewer people seek their services. Therefore, it is important to open safe, legal ways into the EU. The Council conclusions on Resettlement adopted by the Member States in July 2015 following the Commission Recommendation of June 2015 constituted the first strategic joint resettlement effort. The Commission also adopted on 15 December 2015 a Recommendation for a voluntary humanitarian admission scheme to create a system of solidarity and responsibility sharing with Turkey for the protection of persons displaced by the conflict in Syria to Turkey.</p> <p>The EU-Turkey Statement of 18</p>

	<p>March 2016 aims at breaking the business model of the smugglers, and offers migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk.</p> <p>Moreover, the Commission, as part of the migration package to be adopted later in 2016, intends to make a proposal for an EU-wide structured system on resettlement. These resettlement efforts will help bring people in need of international protection to the EU safely.</p>
<p>4.5.1. The EESC strongly supports close cooperation with third countries along the entire smuggling route. While the Committee agrees that the focus should be on the support of border management, it also believes it is in this area that EU cooperation and coordination between the existing Network of Immigration Liaison Officers, European migration officers and Member States' diplomatic representatives should be a key priority.</p>	<p>The Commission welcomes the view of the Committee. Through the setting up of cooperation platforms in priority third countries, the coordination and cooperation among all relevant stakeholders in the host country, including immigration officers and European migration officers, is foreseen to be enhanced. In addition, the Commission is in the process of evaluating the Immigration Liaison Officers (ILO) network and will possibly make proposals to increase the effectiveness of the networks. ILOs themselves and relevant stakeholders will be consulted in the process.</p>

<p>N°16 An EU common list of safe countries of origin for the purposes of Directive 2013/32/EU COM(2015) 452 final – EESC 2015/5379 - REX/457 512th Plenary Session - December 2015 Rapporteur: Mr José Antonio MORENO DÍAZ (GRII-ES) DG HOME – Commissioner AVRAMOPOULOS</p>	
<p>Points of the EESC opinion considered essential</p>	<p>Commission position</p>
<p>2.4. In any case, in Article 2 of the Regulation it must explicitly set out the specific, practical and precise indicators and criteria to be used to assess whether a country should be included on the list of safe countries of origin, inter alia, up-to-date information from sources such as the European Court of Human Rights, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the Council of Europe (CoE) and other human rights organisations.</p> <p>2.5. The decision to include a country on the common list should be substantiated and justified by carrying out an assessment using all criteria set out in the previous point, regarding the grounds for persecution and serious danger that would merit granting international protection.</p> <p>2.6. With regard to amending the list, a more flexible mechanism for amendments must be provided that is able to respond to changing circumstances in countries included on the list within a reasonable time frame.</p> <p>2.7. The EESC considers that it is</p>	<p>As requested by the Committee, the Commission applied the conditions set out in Annex I of Directive 2013/32/EU for the designation of safe countries of origin when including the third countries in the proposed list. The Commission considers that these countries fulfil these criteria. This implies that, on the basis of the legal situation, the application of the law within a democratic system and the general political circumstances, it can be shown that there is in these countries generally and consistently no persecution as defined in Article 9 of Directive 2011/95/EU, no torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and no threat by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict.</p> <p>The Commission based its assessment on a range of sources of information, including, in particular, information from other Member States, EASO, UNHCR, the Council of Europe and other relevant international organisations.</p> <p>The Commission took particular account</p>

necessary to substantiate and justify any amendment to the list, by taking into account expert opinions from UNHCR, EASO, CoE and other human rights organisations in order to amend the list.

2.8 The EESC also believes it necessary to establish a mechanism whereby recognised organisations defending human rights, together with ombudsmen and economic and social committees, may initiate the procedure to amend the list.

of the national institutional and legal framework relevant for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms and the observance of those rights and freedoms, as reflected in up-to-date country reports, and the existence of a system of effective remedies against violations of those rights and freedoms, including membership of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Commission took account of the assessment made by (1) the European Council when designating five of the countries on the proposed list as candidate countries, which requires the fulfilment of the “Copenhagen criteria” (democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities); (2) the assessment made by Member States, when designating the countries on the proposed list as safe countries of origin and when deciding on the asylum applications of the citizens of those countries as reflected by the recognition rate; as well as (3) the assessment made by the European Court of Human Rights, when deciding on cases brought against the countries on the proposed list.

As requested by the Committee, the conditions set in Annex I of Directive 2013/32/EU for the designation of safe countries of origin shall be applied and the afore-mentioned sources of information be used also when carrying out the regular review of the situation in third countries that are on the EU common list as well as when proposing the inclusion of further third countries.

	<p>The proposal foresees that, in accordance with the provisions of the TFEU, amendments to the EU common list are adopted by ordinary legislative procedure.</p>
<p>2.9. The EESC proposes requiring a substantiated decision on the relevance of applying the concept of safe country of origin to a specific case, after an individual assessment, as set out in Directive 2013/32/EU.</p> <p>2.10. At the same time, procedural safeguards for accelerated procedures should be reinforced, ensuring that an individual examination of the specific case and the relevance of applying the concept of safe country of origin is carried out for every case.</p> <p>2.11. The EESC believes that the concept of safe country of origin should under no circumstances be applied in cases of infringement of press freedoms, undermining of political pluralism, or in countries where persecution takes place on the grounds of gender and/or sexual orientation, or of belonging to a national, ethnic, cultural or religious minority.</p> <p>2.12. The EESC also considers that the mechanism to identify applicants in vulnerable situations should be improved. In cases where the said situation is identified after the accelerated procedure has already been initiated, the ordinary procedure must be applied immediately.</p> <p>2.13. Finally, access to effective remedy should be guaranteed – with a suspensory effect in accordance with Article 46(5) of</p>	<p>The Commission proposal foresees the possibility to apply the same safe country of origin provisions that, according to Directive 2013/32/EU, apply to the third countries designated as safe by a Member State, also to the third countries on the EU common list.</p> <p>This implies that Member States should be able to presume its safety for a particular applicant, unless he or she presents counter-indications. This said, in line with Directive 2013/32/EU, the circumstance that a third country will be on the EU common list of safe countries of origin cannot establish an absolute guarantee of safety for nationals of that country and will therefore not dispense of the need to conduct an appropriate individual examination of their application for international protection. It is also recalled that, where an applicant shows that there are serious reasons to consider the country not to be safe in his or her particular circumstances, the designation of the country as safe can no longer be considered relevant for him or her.</p> <p>Member States may provide that an examination procedure in accordance with the basic principles and guarantees of Directive 2013/32/EU be accelerated and/or conducted at the border or in transit zones in accordance with</p>

<p>Directive 2013/32/EU – against negative decisions on the grounds that a country of origin is deemed to be safe.</p>	<p>Directive 2013/32/EU.</p> <p>A court or tribunal shall have the power to rule whether or not the applicant may remain on the territory of the Member State, either upon the applicant's request or acting <i>ex officio</i>, if such a decision to dismiss an asylum application as inadmissible pursuant to the safe country of origin provisions results in ending the applicant's right to remain in the Member State and where in such cases the right to remain in the Member State pending the outcome of the remedy is not provided for in national law.</p>
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