EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

I wish you all a happy and rewarding year. I hope that it brings you much satisfaction and joy in your home lives, of course, but also in your professional lives.

Work plays a substantial role in our lives. It is practically impossible to separate it completely from our home lives.

We all need the satisfaction of knowing that a job has been well done and the recognition that that deserves.

A huge number of our fellow Europeans are workers. However, we must not overlook those who are not employees with salaries, those who are still too young to work, those who are retired and those who have no work because they are ill, have severe disabilities, are unemployed or are unable to work for some other reason.

Moreover, the vast majority of the civil society organisations represented at the Committee operate in areas directly related to work. That is, quite simply, because of the huge importance of work in our lives.

In addition to what we ourselves invest in our work - skills, courage, energy and drive - there is one thing that I believe to be essential if my hopes for you this year are to be fully realised, and that is to be surrounded by sincerity, loyalty, dialogue and, where possible, solidarity. We need each other.

Whatever happens, let us not forget the two fundamental things which must unite us all, especially at these difficult times for Europe and its institutions. Firstly, the European Union is an asset for its people, and it must therefore be preserved and developed. Secondly, within the EU, civil society must be organised and encouraged to form organisations, as it needs to be represented and listened to.

Georges Dassis
EESC President

DIARY DATES

7-8 February - Valletta, Malta
Islands in the EU: from Structural Handicap to Inclusive Territory

22-23 February - EESC, Brussels
EESC plenary session

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European society should transition from a throw-away culture to a more sustainable, job-rich era

EESC adopts opinions on the collaborative economy, the functional economy and ‘nudge thinking’

The EESC December plenary highlighted the importance of the collaborative and functional economies as new business models for a more sustainable Europe. However, it also called on the Commission to ensure that the collaborative economy does not increase job insecurity and opportunities for tax evasion. Nudge thinking is one way to achieve this. The EESC also proposed developing a new way to regulate and measure a new economy using different standards.

During the debate on its opinion on the collaborative economy, the EESC raised concerns about the threat of job insecurity and the increased opportunity for tax avoidance in the decentralised digital economy. The EESC urged against shifting the value added chain away from real economy actors to the owners of proprietary digital platforms, such as car sharing. The opinion focuses on solutions such as an independent European rating agency for digital platforms based on transparency, non-discrimination and trust.

In its opinion on the functional economy, the EESC called for European society to begin an economic transition from over-exploitation of resources and a throw-away culture to a more sustainable, job-rich circular era based on quality rather than quantity. The Committee recommended stepping up the pace of research and achievements in new methods of production and consumption connected to the functional economy, such as product eco-design, the circular economy and the economy for the common good.

The Committee also adopted an opinion on nudge policy making. “Nudging involves changing people’s behaviour by means of ‘gentle nudges’ or hints – and can be used in nearly every policy field, such as energy use, health care and waste management. The EESC will encourage the use of this effective and easy-to-implement tool in policy making at European and national level. When nudges are designed carefully, taking into account both technical and ethical issues, they have the power to encourage people to alter their behaviour.” (mm)

EESC calls upon Commissioner Katainen to operationalise investment plan without delay

Opinion on EFSI 2.0 recommends involvement of private capital

In December, the Council of Ministers decided to extend the European fund for strategic investments (EFSI 2.0), with an additional half a trillion euros of investments by 2020. The EESC December plenary called for its immediate implementation, geographically balanced coverage across the EU and the guaranteed involvement of private capital.

EFSI has demonstrated the solidity of the initial plan. Operations approved so far are worth more than EUR 154 billion, 62% funded by private investors, 38% from SMEs and more than 30,000 microenterprises have been supported. The EESC welcomed the Commission’s proposal and the Council’s decision to prolong EFSI and boost its financing. SME support should be continued but, as was emphasised in the opinion, SMEs should be made aware that they have received support from the EU. The EESC also called for greater involvement of private capital and underlined the importance of a balanced geographical and sectoral coverage. Furthermore, the EESC highlighted the need to reinforce EFSI’s social dimension and recommended bolstering the European Investment Advisory Hub (EIAH) and strengthening the role of National Promotion Banks.

According to Alberto Mazzola (Employers’ Group– IT), EESC rapporteur on EFSI: “We propose the ever greater involvement of private capital – the bond market, insurance and investment funds - while guaranteeing their proper use. In Europe, institutional investors manage EUR 1.3 trillion, less than 1% of which is invested in infrastructure.” The Juncker Plan, which has more funding than other initiatives, enables investment in large-scale cross-border European projects worth over EUR 10 billion each, supported mainly by private capital. “To implement these projects, the Commission must be proactive. EFSI should also support factors including digital technologies related to the common security and defence industry, and amend accordingly the list of sectors excluded from the EU”, the EESC rapporteur stated. (mm)

Special issue inside

Following the award ceremony for the 2016 EESC Civil Society Prize last December, EESC Info is publishing a special insert featuring the profiles of and interviews with the winners, as well as EESC President Georges Dassis’ thoughts on migration as a key issue of our time and Vice-President Gonzalo Lobo Xavier’s views on the meaning of the EESC Civil Society Prize.


**Commission must push for greater solidarity in 2017, says EESC**

In their plenary session debate with European Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans, EESC members called for restored solidarity and responsibility, as stated in the EESC’s contribution to the European Commission’s 2017 Work Programme.

The EESC considers that 2017 should be devoted to strengthening the EU’s economic and social cohesion and to reinforcing its global role and European sense of identity with the EU. EESC President Georges Dassis stated: “We must fight against inequality and against poverty; this is the only way to convince Europeans to rally around the European project.” Building systematic dialogue with civil society organisations and strengthening social dialogue are key to achieving the EU’s objectives.

Vice-President Timmermans acknowledged that: “The biggest challenge we are facing is to improve socio-economic conditions, and our immediate action for 2017 will be to focus on the pillar of social rights, the digital single market and energy union.”

In its contribution to the European Commission’s 2017 Working Programme, the EESC calls on the Commission to make sure that the European Semester reaches the EU 2020 targets. It also concludes that completion of the Single Market should be of prime concern.

The role of the EU as a global promoter of peace and stability needs strengthening through a common asylum system, a strong common foreign and development policy, international police cooperation and effective external border control.

**Aviation: A new approach to safety is needed, says the EESC**

Safety is the cornerstone of a sustainable aviation sector, a key area for economic growth in the EU. But aviation safety in the 21st century means to be ready and to regularly adapt to new safety risks such as drones and new forms of cybercrime. To adjust to this evolving technological environment, the EESC has adopted an opinion that supports a new approach to safety based on risk assessment and performance, with regular evaluation of the rules every five years.

“New rules for aviation safety will need to ensure safe, secure and environmentally friendly air transport for all passengers and the public”, said Raymond Hencks (Workers’ Group – LU), rapporteur on the opinion, “We need to take into account the essential European dimension of aviation safety and increase action at EU level. Member States should have a common approach to avoid complexity and duplication when it comes to safety standards.”

In addition to this new approach, the European Aviation Safety Agency’s (EASA) capacity should be enhanced and a transparent and inclusive transition to the new system based on risk assessment and performance should be ensured. In the EESC’s view, the EASA’s mandate should be further extended to incorporate greater responsibilities in the area of security; in particular this should include dealing with emergencies. Its funding should not depend on charging for Single European Sky services. At the same time, additional elements such as certification requirements for ground handlers and a licensing system for cabin crew should be considered.

The EESC calls for comprehensive and coherent regulations for drones to ensure safety. As such, a coherent approach to licensing for the operation and possession of drones must be put in place, including a registration process.

**EESC urges strategic revision of the EU Cybersecurity Strategy**

The Internet and digital technologies play an essential role in economic and social life. The digital economy already generates over one fifth of GDP growth in the EU. Our society depends on the Internet and digital technology; it is therefore important that this critical infrastructure be properly protected.

Cybersecurity incidents cause major damage to the EU economy and undermine people’s trust in the digital society. According to the Global State of Information Security Survey 2016, around 80% of EU companies have experienced at least one cybersecurity incident, and security incidents across all industries worldwide rose by 38% in 2015.

For the EESC, this is proof that the 2013 EU Cybersecurity Strategy and the actions undertaken as part of this strategy are not sufficient to ensure resilience to cyberattacks and an adequate response to incidents. The EESC has therefore adopted an opinion on Strengthening Europe’s Cyber Resilience System in which it welcomes the European Commission’s communication on this subject, but also calls for the Cybersecurity Strategy to be updated, and proposes a range of measures, such as the allocation of adequate funding to the institutions in charge of cybersecurity incidents and cybersecurity R&I. Moreover, the EESC hopes that the contractual public-private partnership on cybersecurity will be used to support the development of specialised cybersecurity companies.

While the EESC welcomes the Commission’s intention to evaluate the mandate of the European Network and Information Security Agency, it also calls for the creation of an EU authority for cybersecurity, as well as a national cybersecurity development model and rating system to measure each Member State’s resilience level. In the Committee’s view, it is among other things crucial to educate public administration staff on relevant issues, raise citizens’ awareness of risks and strengthen cooperation between all parties involved.

**Maltese presidency of the EU: focusing on the essentials**

Taking the helm for the first time in January 2017, Malta’s turn at the rotating EU Council Presidency comes at a crucial time for Europe. Aside from marking the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome in March 2017 and – on that occasion – rounding off the reflection process on the future of the EU that was launched by the Heads of State or Government in September 2016 in Bratislava, Malta is also mindful of the possibility of Article 50 being triggered, and is therefore also preparing for the potential start of the Brexit negotiations. Following the Dutch and Slovak presidencies, the current trio will last until July 2017. To guide its presidency, Malta has chosen the following priorities:

- migration: strengthening and streamlining the Common European Asylum System;
- the Single Market: removing obstacles such as roaming charges and developing the Capital Markets Union;
- security: combating terrorism, managing the Union’s external border, improving Eurojust governance;
- social inclusion: improving women’s participation in the labour market, combatting gender-based violence;
- Europe’s neighbourhood: stabilising Libya, the Middle East Peace Process, the Syrian conflict and engagement with the Eastern Neighbourhood;
- maritime: international ocean governance, the Western Mediterranean sea basin initiative.

Reflecting the importance of these priorities, the Maltese presidency has asked the EESC to issue exploratory opinions on the following subjects:

- Nautical and maritime tourism
- Upscaling skills of persons in the labour market
- High-quality education for all
- Islands in the EU: from structural handicap to inclusive territory

Among the hearings and meetings to be held in Malta, the Committee will be organising its annual European Consumer Day event on the island on 21 March 2017. This year’s theme will be The Digital Single Market: How does it benefit consumers? (j.k).

**Key EESC events in connection with the Maltese presidency**

- **25 January**: EESC plenary session: presentation of Maltese presidency priorities (Brussels)
- **7 February**: Public hearing: What future for islands in the European Union? (Malta)
- **22 February**: Opening of exhibition – Textures of memory by Joe P Smith (Brussels)
- **21 March**: Conference: European Consumer Day (Malta)
- **April**: Conference: Digital Europe and industrial change (Malta)
- **31 May**: Opening of exhibition – Regnum by Kris Micallief (Brussels)
- **22 – 23 June**: Annual meeting of Presidents and Secretaries-general of EU ESCs and the EESC (Malta)
- **5 July**: EESC plenary session: presentation of the results of the Maltese presidency (Brussels)
Solidarity with migrants in the European Union

Throughout history, migrants have actively contributed to developing European societies economically, socially, culturally, and in terms of diversity. Now, with an ageing population, we need their skills, energy and determination. Studies by the United Nations show that migrants contribute more to societies than they take out.

Migration and the reception of refugees are one of the biggest challenges Europe is currently facing. It is appropriate, therefore, for the 2016 EESC Civil Society Prize to reward civil society organisations and individuals who have taken up the challenge of helping refugees and migrants, improving their lives and helping them to integrate into society.

Since the start of the refugee crisis, the EESC has conducted fact-finding missions in 11 EU countries and Turkey, enabling EESC members to observe the harsh living conditions on the ground and to put forward a number of recommendations in a report published in March 2016, in particular that the EU and Member States must implement a fair, common asylum system, and that refugees need safe, legal routes into Europe, followed by long-term integration policies.

Civil Society organisations carry out invaluable work, often filling the gaps in public services. From southern Italy to Scandinavia, from France to the Balkans, civil society organisations are working to defend the human rights and dignity of migrants and their families. In some countries, social partners are uniting to help migrants into the labour market.

I am very proud to showcase to the world such moving examples of solidarity on the part of European organisations and individuals who have demonstrated an enormous capacity for empathy, mobilisation and organised action. I only regret one thing, that we could not give this award to more organisations, all the more so, as I personally would have really wished to see an Italian organisation among the winners. At any event, I wish to pay tribute to all the myriad organisations and individuals who, throughout Europe, sometimes even in the face of a hostile environment or in the hardship of economic crisis, help make the suffering of so many human beings a little more tolerable.

The EESC Civil Society Prize 2016 on video

Watch the awarding ceremony here (5:13 minutes): europa.eu/!TD66Kt
Watch a presentation of the 5 winning projects here (4:53 minutes): europa.eu/!dF33py

Celebrating civil society at its best

As the 2016 EESC Civil Society Prize comes to an end, I would like to share a few thoughts with our readers on this very positive chapter of my term of office. With its 284 applications – the highest-ever number since the creation of the prize ten years ago! - it was a real challenge for the evaluation committee and the selection board to choose the ultimate winners from among such a wealth of valuable projects and examples of great human solidarity.

The record number of applications and the difficulty of making a choice were further proof, if any were needed, of civil society’s crucial role in tackling the challenge of migration, whether in rescuing or welcoming refugees and migrants, meeting their basic needs or working to ensure their social integration. Our five winners definitely cover the whole spectrum.

For the EESC, rewarding civil society’s most outstanding examples in this area was indeed the most fitting way to round off a year that had begun with a long series of fact-finding missions across Europe intended to examine civil society’s role in handling the huge influx of migrants and refugees. The missions we carried out highlighted how crucial civil society is in supporting public authorities, sometimes even replacing them in places where they are not active.

For this reason, in celebrating our five winners, I would also like to pay tribute to all the organisations and individuals who applied for the prize. Their work, collectively and individually, is invaluable. It tells a very different story to the racism, fear and xenophobia often shown by the media. Indeed, as the selection process went ahead it became clear that we were building up a repertoire of best practices and practical solutions that would be worth sharing and disseminating to serve as models.

The EESC’s Communication department has therefore agreed to work with the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) and its president Pavel Trantina, who have supported our work throughout the prize with their policy expertise on migration and integration, to draw together all this information and publish it in book format. Combined with the reports from our members’ missions last year, the publication is expected to be of help to both European governments and civil society representatives in responding to the challenges facing our Europe.

Once again, congratulations to all those who took part and made a difference. You are all winners!

Georges Dassis
EESC President

EESC Civil Society Prize rewards most outstanding examples of solidarity with migrants

Hungarian NGO Artemisszio Foundation awarded first prize for championing diverse and multicultural society in Hungary

On 15 December 2016 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) awarded its 2016 Civil Society Prize to five organisations and individuals from across Europe who have demonstrated outstanding examples of solidarity towards refugees and migrants. The first prize went to the Hungarian NGO Artemisszio Foundation (14,000 EUR), while the German, French and Italian organisation SOS Mediterranee, the Greek baker Dionysis Arvanitakis, a branch of the Spanish NGO SOS Racismo and the Greek NGO Iliaktida (Sunebeam) received second prizes of 9,000 EUR each.

In her acceptance speech Adrienn Zsu Csonty, coordinator of the Artemisszio’s Building Bridges project, said: “We are very grateful for the Prize and proud of it. Through this prize, Europe has recognised the work of civil society. Civil society’s actions have been essential to save lives in a such a large-scale migration crisis. This Prize sends a strong and positive message to migrants and refugees. We take this prize as a solid engagement from the EU to stand by the people who are looking for peace and shelter.”

Through these awards, the EESC hopes to help the selected organisations, which often do not have access to, or cannot rely on, government funds, to secure the resources they need to carry on and scale up their projects. It also hopes to see them replicated in other European countries and even beyond, as examples of best practices for others to consider.

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 www.eesc.europa.eu

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www.eesc.europa.eu
Showcasing the winners

In the following pages we present the 5 winners of the EESC’s 2016 Civil Society Prize and their answers to our questions in the wake of the award.

This Prize sends a strong and positive message to migrants and refugees. We take this prize as a solid engagement from the EU to stand by the people who are looking for peace and shelter.

The EESC has published a brochure showcasing the five winning projects. The brochure also provides background information about the Civil Society Prize in general and about the EESC’s extensive work towards a pan-European migration and asylum policy. The brochure can be downloaded at: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/pe-04-16-734-en-n.pdf

Artemisszió Foundation (HU) is an NGO which has over 20-years’ experience, operating under very difficult circumstances in integrating migrants and refugees in society both in social and cultural terms. Its programme Building Bridges has helped many refugees and migrants feel part of Hungarian society with the assistance of volunteer mentors who take refugees under their wing and initiate them to the local language, customs and culture. Migrants also receive vocational training in preparation for the local labour market. The organisation is looking to upscale the programme, which currently can benefit 60 individuals at a time, to build a larger community that is constantly expanding – The “Mira Community in Hungary”.

EESC Info: Please explain what receiving this prize means for you and your organisation

AF: The prize confirms that we have a clear idea of the problem as well as the possible solutions. It shows that we are not alone and that we can count on the support of others. It also shows recognition for the work we have carried out so far. This is something which we very much appreciate and makes us very proud.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results on such activities and programmes?

The situation with refugees changes from country to country, from one moment to the next. It is important to respond quickly to crises, but also to provide help and maintain the momentum derived from the success of joint action in the longer term. We find that this can be best achieved if we reduce the distance between those giving and receiving help as much as possible and create an environment in which anyone can become a helper, regardless of their status.

How will you use this specific funding to improve care and the well-being of migrants?

From 2017, we will no longer receive the assistance we have been getting from UNHCR in 2016 to build the core of the Mira Community, since there is currently no refugee crisis in Hungary, at least as far as the numbers are concerned. However, this does not mean that the situation is good. The refugees and asylum seekers who live in Hungary today face increasingly difficult conditions as well as rejection, not so much by society as by institutions. We aim to continue providing them with a safe community where they can find a home and prepare to become useful members of Hungarian society. A large number of volunteers help keep the community going, but our costs are still high. We will use the cash prize to cover the community’s maintenance costs, a significant proportion of which are linked to the continuous training of voluntary mentors and language teachers.

The EESC launched the annual Civil Society Prize scheme a decade ago, in 2006, to highlight the efforts of active citizens and organisations in Europe to improve life in their communities. The aim is to reward and encourage projects – already implemented or on-going - that have achieved real results in a different field each year and raise awareness of how civil society is helping reinforce the common values that underpin European identity and integration.

The competition is open to civil society organisations registered in the EU as well as to individuals.

In 2016, the EESC received 284 applications from 27 countries. The evaluation committee – made up by three EESC members and an external evaluator – made a shortlist of finalists, which was then submitted to a selection board consisting of the enlarged EESC presidency and the secretary-general.

The evaluators looked for innovative projects bringing real benefits for migrants in areas such as:

- offering emergency relief;
- providing social support, housing and health services;
- giving practical support and advice;
- fighting xenophobia, racism and discrimination;
- combating exploitation and promoting mutual respect and tolerance;
- raising awareness of rights and obligations and empowering new arrivals;
- providing education and training for third-country nationals and receiving communities;
- highlighting the positive contribution migrants make to European society.

The evaluation committee applied a range of criteria, assessing:

- the initiative’s success in serving its target audience and raising awareness of the facts about migration;
- its long-term impact and;
- its sustainable contribution to community well-being.

In addition, the initiatives needed to:

- be innovative, creative and unique;
- involve migrants themselves and;
- offer an inspiring example for others to follow.

The prize ceremony took place in Brussels on 15 December 2016, with the EUR 50,000 award shared between the winners and runners-up.

In previous years, awards have gone to a range of projects and initiatives to combat poverty and social exclusion, support Roma communities, promote sustainable lifestyles and green jobs, encourage networking, education and campaigning, and to defend the interests of young people.
Small children from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan show us the bread with their hands. They do not know the word for food. What man’s heart can remain unmoved when he sees a small child eat the soil?

**Dionysis Arvanitakis**

(EL) is a 77-year-old Greek baker who at the height of the crisis was baking over 100 kg of bread every day for the desperate refugees who landed on the island of Kos, just off the coast of Turkey. His generosity inspired colleagues, citizens, hotel owners and many more to follow his example.

**SOS Racismo Gipuzkoa**

(ES) is a branch of SOS Racismo located in San Sebastián and founded in 1993 to combat racism, intolerance and xenophobia. The winning project - Bizilagunak or “Next door family” - is based on an idea that is very simple, though complex to put into practice: a native household welcomes a migrant family into their home for a meal so that they can talk and get to know each other in the street and become simply two families inter-relating on an equal footing, and thus cease to be the invisible figures who walk past the walls of racism, xenophobia, fear and distrust.

**EESC Info: Please explain what receiving this prize means for you and your organisation**

**DA:** I am delighted about the award. I would like to offer my warmest thanks to everyone who is involved with the EESC for showing respect for migrants in this way. I would also like to thank them for the honour they have bestowed on me in awarding me this prize. I feel a sense of vindication at seeing this problem reach the ears of Europe; not just the problem of my island, but of the whole of Greece. The Greek people are going through a difficult economic period and have nevertheless provided accommodation and food and have treated these people in the best possible way.

**What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results on such activities and programmes?**

Try to offer as much as possible. I think it is important to be able to make as many people aware of this endeavour as possible because I believe that the more people who make an effort, the better the results will be and the better for the future of those who are suffering.

**How will you use this specific funding to improve care and the well-being of migrants?**

My family and I have run a shop producing pastries and bread. The money will go towards this small business, enabling me to provide these people with as much assistance as possible, as I have been doing up until now.

**EESC Info: Please explain what receiving this prize means for you and your organisation**

**SOS Racismo: First and foremost it means recognition for the thousands of people who, year after year, have turned their homes into a micro-space for integration and for the volunteers and members of the organisation who have worked to expand the initiative. From an institutional point of view, the award is an expression of support for our work and for the gamble we took in searching for new ways of promoting co-existence. It also represents recognition for the organisations that have provided financial support for the initiative. It is our hope that this support will take root and grow, with the involvement of new financial backers.**

**What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results on such activities and programmes?**

Our first piece of advice is to dare to do something different. The only risk is that it might not turn out as well as we would have liked and we will have to go back to square one. Our second piece of advice is to evaluate, think over what didn’t go so well during the year and gradually improve over the following years. Integration and innovation are processes that take place in the medium-term.

Thirdly, to bring the whole team on board: everyone needs to believe in the idea and it has to be a joint approach. Fourthly, the processes of integration and combating racism and xenophobia call for strong synergies between the public and private sectors. Other public organisations need to be involved if this is to be an initiative that belongs “to everyone”, one that will lay the foundations for replication in the future. Fifthly, the outcome needs to be made visible: initiatives need to be known and recognised by the public. Our sixth piece of advice is to focus squarely on the real protagonists, shedding light on the reality of migrants and programmes? The project has grown from 60 meals in 2012 (120 families) to 260 meals in 2015 (520 families) and has been shown to significantly reduce the perception of insecurity and increase positive emotions, such as admiration, towards migrants.

**Our second piece of advice is to evaluate, think over what didn’t go so well during the year and gradually improve over the following years. Integration and innovation are processes that take place in the medium-term.**
SOS MEDITERRANEE is a group of ordinary citizens who thought they could and must take action to protect human life and dignity in the context of political failure. In the past 11 months we have rescued 6600 people. They arrive on our decks traumatised but also hopeful. The Aquarius with its team is the only independent civil society boat remaining active in these harsh winter months in the Mediterranean. We wish we were not needed. And we also wish we were not alone. But we will continue as citizens who can and must stand to act in solidarity with the people who are coming to Europe for survival and for sanctuary. We continue to call for safe and legal passage, for a better and bigger response at sea than we are able to deliver by ourselves today. We call for this because today we too have hope for Europe to be a continent where humanity is a value we put in practice, not just talk about.

EESC Info: Please explain what receiving this prize means for you and your organisation

SOS MEDITERRANEE: We are very honoured to receive this prize. We see it as a recognition of the important work the SOS MEDITERRANEE teams are doing on our ship AQUARIUS as well as in the national associations in France, Italy and Germany.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results on such activities and programmes?

SOS MEDITERRANEE: SOS MEDITERRANEE is a European-wide organisation with staff and members of diverse backgrounds, coming together in solidarity with people in need. We bring what we can as citizens. Other organisations can also contribute their diverse expertise to put European values into practice. The priority should always be to save lives and alleviate the suffering of those in need while seeking humane long-term solutions.

How will you use this specific funding to improve care and the well-being of migrants?

SOS MEDITERRANEE: We will use the prize money and the support from our generous donors to continue providing emergency rescue response as the only independent organisation operating in the central Mediterranean during the harsh winter months.

ILIAKTIDA (EL) is a non-profit organisation based in Lesvos which has been helping cover the basic needs of refugees and migrants providing them with social, legal, linguistic, medical and psychological support through professional staff. Its main concern and goal has been to get refugees out of camps and into local communities. Based on this concept, they have been running local guesthouses and apartments where refugees can start a daily routine, do their shopping, cook their meals, enjoy local cultural activities, meet the locals and develop friendly relationships with them. The organisation encourages migrants to contribute to their activities and to share their experience with the newcomers and the locals. A certain number of migrants and refugees have even found work and made the first steps into a new, independent and integrated life in Greece.

EESC Info: Please explain what receiving this prize means for you and your organisation

ILIAKTIDA: The prize is a gift for all of us. It’s a reward for all the efforts we have made and will continue to make. It’s the joy that revives you when you get home tired.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results on such activities and programmes?

ILIAKTIDA: Every individual and organisation needs to learn to work in a team and cooperate with others. We need to listen to the opinions and views of our fellow workers, and try to treat all human beings in need just as if they were us or our own people. We have to take risks in people’s best interests. We should not project our own needs on migrant populations, but simply try to respond to their real needs.

Also, programmes should be carried out with transparency. So what is needed is a combination of rigorous administration and flexibility.

How will you use this specific funding to improve care and the well-being of migrants?

ILIAKTIDA: We would like to use this prize money to set up a pilot project aimed at integrating people who have been granted asylum into their local communities, the main aim being to help them find jobs. One good tool that we would like to make full use of is existing legislation for a social economy. We aim to continue with our plans to set up a cooperative enterprise made up of key workers and partners, both migrants and local people who want to join forces.
Your Europe, Your Say! 2017 kicks off

33 schools from across Europe to come to Brussels to discuss the future of Europe

The European Economic and Social Commit-
tee (EESC) has selected the schools which will be participating in this year’s Your Europe Your Say!, its flagship event for young people. Their names were selected by lot from over 680 applications, in the presence of Gonzalo Lobato Xavier, EESC Vice-President for Communication, and Katiana Vicens Guillén (Workers’ Group – ES) and Indre Vareikyte (Various Interests Group – LT), members of the EESC Communication Group, on 14 December 2016.

Thirty-three secondary schools will be involved in this initiative, one from each of the 28 EU Member States and the five candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey).

In 2017, the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome will be the theme of the Committee’s annual Your Europe Your Say! youth event, offering young people from around Europe the opportu-
nity to share their ideas about the EU of yester-
day, today and tomorrow. Each school will send a delegation of three 16–17-year-old students and a teacher to Brussels to take part in a youth plenary session on 30–31 March 2017, back to back with the EESC’s own plenary session. During the session the students will work together, debate and vote on the political challenges facing the EU at this difficult time, and suggest their own solutions.

The first phase will begin shortly, with EESC mem-
ers visiting the selected school in their own coun-
try to help students prepare for the youth plenary, giving them an overview of how the EESC works and explaining its role in the EU set-up.

With this initiative, the EESC – the voice of civil so-
ciety – is aiming to ensure that the views, experiences and ideas of the younger generation are heard in EU policy making.

The full list of selected schools is available at: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/it/-/portal/en-events-and-activi-
ties-your-europe-your-say-2017-selected-schools (ka)

Access to land – a serious challenge for Europe’s farmers

On 7 December, members of the EESC attended a conference entitled Access to land for farmers in the EU, organised by the European Green Party, in the EESC’s and the European Parliament’s premises in Brussels.

Brendan Burns, President of the EESC NAT section, referred to his country, Scotland, where 50% of the land is in the hands of only 500 people mainly living outside Scotland, which results in declining villages, deserted landscapes and a weakening economy.

Since 1999, Scotland has been trying to change this situation, facing many obstacles, such as those encountered when communities want to buy land from owners living far away from Scotland. The situation in Scotland, which has prevented sus-
tainable rural development of huge parts of the coun-
try and of society, should be a warning example for Europe,” said Mr. Burns.

Sylvia Kay, from the Amsterdam-based Transna-
tional Institute (TNI), has been monitoring the sit-
uation of farming and land access in Europe for
many years and presented some alarming figures at the conference: in Europe, 3% of the farms control 52% of the land, and 1% of the large farms (over 100 ha) control 75% of European farming land. In Bulgaria, the situation is even worse, with 83.5 % of the farmland in the hands of only 2% of farmers. In
Finland, the number of large farms has grown more than five-fold (5.5) and the farmland they control has increased six-fold. In the Netherlands, the number of large farms has tripled.

At the same time, Europe is facing a massive decline in small-scale farms (up to 10 ha) of the 12 million in operation between 1995 and 2013, only 8 million have survived, which represents a 33% reduction.

In Estonia, 62% of small farms have disappeared in only 10 years, between 2003 and 2013. The high concentration of ownership, both on the supplier and customer side, and the trend towards fewer but larger farms are causing problems in the upstream and downstream economy, cutting many jobs and hollowing out rural areas.

The EESC has been working on solutions for a long time and has called for both support for small farm-
ers and a fairer and more sustainable European CAP. The EESC is also particularly concerned about some of the consequences of the free movement of capital within the EU, as enshrined in the Trea-
ties, and has called on the European Parliament and the Council to discuss whether the principle of free movement of capital should be guaranteed in respect of the alienation and acquisition of agri-
cultural land. (sm)

The EESC Polish delegation seeks closer cooperation with key institutions in Poland

On 16 December, just after the EESC Plenary Session, the EESC Polish delegation visited some key institutions in Warsaw to present the EESC’s ongoing work and discuss potential areas of coop-
eration. Special attention was paid to own-initia-
tive opinions by Polish rapporteurs adopted during the first year of the EESC’s current term of office.

Discussions with Marek Prawda, the newly appointed director of the European Commis-

sion Representation Office in Poland, focused on enhancing cooperation between civil society and the European Commission Office, including assis-
tance provided by the latter in promoting the EESC’s work, as well as on key problems related to Euro-
pean integration.

Discussions with Jacek Safuta, director of the Euro-

pean Parliament Information Office in Poland, focused on potential tools to promote citizen par-
ticipation in the next European Parliament election and increase cooperation between civil society and the European Parliament Office.

The final meeting, which took place at the Ministry of the Family, Labour and Social Policy, afforded an opportunity to present the important work car-
rried out by Polish members of the EESC and the EESC as a whole to Secretaries of State Krzysztof Michalekewicz and Stanislaw Szwej. During a lively debate, which also involved the directors of five key departments in the Ministry, a package of important EESC opinions was presented. Special attention was paid to the opinion on the posting of workers directive, adopted just two days before.

The Ministry representatives answered a number of questions, explaining the Polish government’s position on the European Commission’s proposal. They also offered to host EESC events such as seminars or hearings, recognising such activities as a good tool for promoting EU values in Polish society. (lp)

The EESC and the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum address the situation of civil society and migration policies

At the 3rd joint seminar between the EESC and the EU-Russia Forum on 23 November 2016, rep-

resentatives of both EU and Russian civil society organisations exchanged views on the situation of civil society in Russia and in Europe as well as on migration.

“Contacts between civil societies on both sides form an integral part of EU-Russia economic and social relations. Ensuring that Russian and EU civil soc-
ties can interact freely and thus contribute to build-

ing mutual trust and understanding is of the utmost importance”, said Dilyana Slavova (Various Inter-
est Group – BG), President of the EESC’s External Relations section.

Yuri Dzhibladze, member of the steering com-
mittee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, said: “The backlash against civil society has intensified in Russia: almost 150 NGOs have been included in the ‘foreign agents’ list since this law came into force four years ago. Many have had to close down; others con-
tinue their struggle and experience strong political, legal, and financial pressure and sometimes physi-
ical attacks. Ironically, the situation of civil society in some EU Member States has started to deteriorate, particularly in Hungary and Poland. It is very impor-
tant that dealing with the problem of the restrictions on the freedom of civil society – both in Russia and in the EU – remains a high priority in the policies of EU Members States and EU institutions.”

Members of the EESC and the EU-Russia Civil So-
ciety Forum expressed their deep concern about the deterioration of the situation of civil society organ-
isations and activists in Russia since June 2013.

The rule of law and fundamental freedoms in Russia were also a source of deep concern for participants. They underlined that commitment to democratic procedures must top the agenda in the dialogue between the EU and Russia, regardless of political, economic or security interests. Participants called for increased EU support for Russian civil society.

The political and societal consequences of the arrival of refugees and migrants in EU countries and in Russia were also addressed, with a review of policy responses designed to deal with the new reality at EU, national and especially local level. Representatives highlighted some developments in the refugee crisis in Europe which failed to respect human dignity and international obligations.

Finally, the socio-economic aspects of the inte-
gration of newcomers in Russia and in the EU at local level were raised, as well as the greatest chal-

lenges and examples of good integration prac-
tices. (cad)
Less is more – the Employers’ Group against over-implementation
by the EESC Employers’ Group

Over-zealous transposition of EU law at national level undermines the single market, and hampers development. Numerous Member State governments use transposition as an opportunity to address domestic political issues, which results in “gold-plating”. This adverse trend has a negative impact on business and should be avoided as far as possible. Businesses count on good regulation and a consistent and stable legal framework at both national and EU level. These are some of the conclusions of the conference entitled Transposition of the European law – the key challenge to business activity that took place on 6 December 2016 in Zagreb, Croatia.

Business welcomes the fact that better regulation is a priority for the European Commission. In order to benefit fully from better regulation, a similar approach is needed when EU directives are enacted in national law. The employers continue to insist that a stable, predictable and simple regulatory framework is a condition for growth. Gold-plating has led to over-regulation, created differences in regimes and between Member States, distorted harmonisation and harmed the single market.

The participants in the first panel provided a general overview on better regulation, RIFIT and transposition practices. In the second panel, specific examples of faulty enactment and unnecessarily burdensome EU rules with regard to the competitiveness of the European economy were presented. The conference was organised jointly by the EESC Employers’ Group and the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts, which also hosted the event, with the assistance of the Croatian Employers’ Association and the Croatian Chamber of Commerce. (i)

The third world war is a social war
by the EESC Workers’ Group

The Workers Group organised a cultural event to present the book entitled La troisième guerre mondiale est sociale (The third world war is a social war), written by Bernard Thibault, the former secretary-general of the French CGT and a member of the ILG executive council. Mr Thibault presented the book in person.

La troisième guerre mondiale est sociale is the purposely provocative title of Bernard Thibault’s book published by Éditions de l’Atelier. As a member of the International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) executive council and former secretary-general of the CGT, he denounces the cult of the lowest cost which sacrifices the workers of the world on the altar of competition and proposes, in particular, strengthening the role of the ILO in terms of its historic mission of promoting social justice as a factor of peace in the world. Contrary to the widely-held belief, the solution to this trend is not to withdraw behind nationalist lines, but to promote the equality of human beings in countries across the world by adopting standards that offer protection by paying a decent wage and guaranteeing working conditions.

The presentation was followed by a debate moderated by the President of the Workers’ Group, Gabriele Bischoff, with contributions from various union leaders, in particular, Luca Visentini, secretary-general of the European Trade Union Confederation, Susanna Camusso, secretary-general of the CGIL (Italy), Ignacio Toxo, secretary-general of the CCOD (Spain), Plamen Dimitrov (Workers Group – BG), president of the GCTB (Bulgaria), and Rudy de Leeuw, president of the FGTS (Belgium) (mg)

IN SHORT

EESC corporate video

The EESC has released a new 3-minute video introducing some of its key achievements in shaping EU legislation and policies to reflect the needs of European citizens. Fighting for victims’ rights, protecting consumers, combating poverty, supporting business, growth and job creation, and promoting social inclusion - these are some of the practical examples of how the Committee has helped improve citizens’ daily lives.

The video presents the Committee’s organisation and the work of its 350 members, who, through their hands-on experience, advise EU legislators and make sure that European citizens have a chance to be heard.

Watch the video here: europa.eu/UG/19HP

Various Interests’ Group President Luca Jahier opens the Forum of Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe
by the Various Interests Group

The 2nd Forum of Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe took place on 25 November 2016 in Bucharest. Over fifty speakers from twelve European countries were invited to share their experience and insights into democracy. The aim was to discuss the most serious challenges and future trends and to explore how civil society could take greater responsibility and play a more significant role in the situation we are now facing.

The Forum reaffirmed and continued a tradition of joint action and cooperation between civil society organisations in Central and Eastern Europe. It presented new ideas and marshalled civil society in Central and Eastern Europe, generated a tradition of joint action and cooperation, and continuing austerity – a situation exacerbated by ongoing conflict in the region and continuing austerity – a situation exacerbated by ongoing conflict in the region.

The participants in the first panel discussed the role of civil society and its role in the European project. The second panel focused on the role of civil society in shaping EU policies and legislation.

The Forum’s ambition in 2016 was to help sustain democracy and defend the fundamental values underlying European growth. (ii)

Various Interests’ Group President Luca Jahier introduces the Forum of Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe.

Editor: Alain Jones (editor-in-chief)
Daniele Marangoni (dm)

Contributors to this issue: Caroline Albert (Depes) (sad)
Chloé Lahousse (c)
Daniele Marangoni (dm)
Janine Bung (bi)
Joasman Klötzing (ki)
Katerina Sertif (ks)
Krzysztof Pater (kp)
Lech Janczyk (lj)
Margaretha Gawanis (mg)
Milen Minkov (mm)
Sófia.M. Araújo (sma)

Coordination: Daniele Marangoni (dm)

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Address: European Economic and Social Committee
Jacques Delors Building, 99 Rue Belliard, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel. (+32 2) 546.94.76
Fax (+32 2) 546.97.64
Email eescinfo@eesc.europa.eu
Internet: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/

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