



# EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee  
A bridge between Europe and organised civil society  
May 2017 | EN



## EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

### Keep believing

After months of tension and worry, the election results in some Member States have brought a little relief to Europe.

Emmanuel Macron's victory, for example, is a clear indication of a change in the mindset of French voters, when faced with the "same old parties". Obviously, there are deeper political reasons, but the signs of change are clear.

There is a change in the perception of politics and policies by the voters and the result is clear to see, with the election of a candidate who is not bound to a political party and has his own ideas.

I am not a political analyst and while the French situation - although quite different from our own - fascinates me, what reassures me even more is the implications of these results for the European project.

In France, as in other Member States, there was an agenda, a set of ideas put forward by several candidates which - while valid in a democracy - would jeopardise the European project as we know it.

It would not be good for Europe if a country as important as France were to have an anti-European leader.

I am not saying that Europe doesn't need reform and new impetus. What I mean is that we do not need someone who is opposed to the entire project on the basis of ideological concepts rooted in demagogic protectionism and separation, in the name of so-called security.

It is of course our right and our duty to uphold individual and collective values in society, whether we agree with them or not. However, it doesn't make sense when this defence takes the form of an attack on Europe and the peace project that we all dream of and want to continue to benefit from.

We do not currently know the details of the political plans of some leaders who have just been elected and a great deal remains to be seen. Yet, we know that a preference for upholding European ideals and defending European values of growth for all is enough of a reason to be satisfied and to have more hope for the future.

It is reason enough for Europe to breathe a sigh of relief and to look now at reforming, in order to address citizens' concerns and meet their legitimate hopes.

Once again, I am of the view that Members of the EESC, as living witnesses to people's aspirations, must be ready to help promote an inclusive, peaceful Europe in which everyone can contribute and collaborate. That's my hope!

**Gonçalo Lobo Xavier**  
EESC Vice President

## Can Dündar: "Do not leave Turkey alone. Erdogan is not Turkey"



### Exiled Turkish journalist debates media freedom and human rights with EESC

Following recent developments in Turkey, the EESC invited Turkish journalist Can Dündar to its April plenary. The former editor-in-chief of the Turkish newspaper Cumhuriyet called on the EU to stand beside Turkey and its people in support of media freedom, human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

"Turkey represents the largest prison for journalists today", said **Can Dündar**, "If Europe still attaches great importance to freedom of thought and the press, it should support the Turkish people. Europe shouldn't give up its values in the interest of short-term benefits".

The EESC President, **Georges Dassis**, said: "Your fight is our fight and this appeal to us to defend democracy and freedom is important. I hope it will be heard by our governments, national

parliaments and the European Parliament. We will be there to support you".

This message was also echoed by the President of EESC's Workers Group, **Gabriele Bischoff**, who also urged the Turkish authorities to release German journalist Deniz Yücel, currently imprisoned in Turkey. The President of the EESC's Various Interests Group, **Luca Jahier**, and the President of the REX section, **Dilyana Slavova**, reminded those present that in order to return to a democratic and open Turkey, the EU should continue to work alongside its civil society.

Dündar, who currently lives in exile in Germany, was sentenced to five years' jail after his newspaper reported on Turkey's intelligence service smuggling arms to rebels in Syria. The EESC vice-president, **Gonçalo Lobo Xavier**, urged Turkey to work with international journalists' organisations, UNESCO, OSCE and the Council of Europe to restore press freedom in the country. (mm)

## Fight against terrorism financing requires broader measures

### EESC supports Commission's cash control plans but points to the obstacles to their implementation

The EESC backs the Commission's new proposal to expand cash controls at the EU borders and give the authorities more power to conduct checks and confiscate goods in the event of suspected illicit activities, in order to gather more information and uncover cases of terrorism financing. But the EESC has again called upon the Commission to publish a "list of tax havens" responsible for the majority of illicit money flows, seeing failure to do so as a huge obstacle to the effective application of the proposal.

"Cash consignments continue to be the main channel through which money launderers and other financial criminals operate," stated **Javier Doz Orrit**



(Workers' Group - ES), rapporteur for the opinion on Terrorism Financing - Controls of Cash Movements, adopted at the April plenary.

The EESC recommends that, following consultations and a study, the Commission should put together a plan for reducing the use of cash in the EU. "The question of whether the compulsory declarations threshold of EUR 10 000 is appropriate should be considered", said the co-rapporteur, **Mihai Ivaşcu** (Various Interests Group - RO). The opinion

also proposes to broaden the definition of "cash" to include prepaid cards and highly liquid commodities such as gold.

The Committee welcomes the introduction of penalties to be imposed on Member States for failing to comply with the obligation to declare, pointing out, however, that penalties should be standardised and a common communication procedure set up for all Member States.

The opinion also underlines the importance of improving the exchange of information and coordination between the authorities of the Member States and with third countries, and urges Member States to make their anti-terrorist databases available to Europol. (II)

## DIARY DATES

**26-27 June**  
2017 Civil Society Days

**28 June**  
2nd European Day of Social Economy Enterprises

**05-06 July**  
EESC, Brussels: EESC plenary session

## IN THIS ISSUE

**2** EESC consults EU civil society on White Paper on the Future of Europe

**3** EESC proposes stakeholder platform to increase women's employability in transport

**4** Georges Dassis: "When we practise solidarity we can leave a trace in history"



## EESC proposes stakeholder platform to increase women's employability in transport

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### The initiative has been endorsed by the Commission and will be launched in November

Only two in ten transport workers are women. With 78% of jobs occupied by men, transport is one of the sectors most affected by gender inequality. The EESC believes attracting more women is an urgent imperative, and is proposing the creation of a "Platform for Change" to address this issue.

At its April plenary, the EESC approved the opinion on **Women and Transport – Platform for Change**, which defines this new stakeholder forum and provides recommendations to the Commission on how to set it up.

"Transport is a sector designed by men and for men", said EESC rapporteur **Madi Sharma** (Employers' Group – UK). "But today, increasing the number of women in transport is not only a gender argument, it is also an economic and social imperative. The sector desperately needs competent, engaged employees who feel valued and protected in order to bring growth and innovation".

Through this platform, the EESC will be seeking to engage all stakeholders in the process of changing the working environment of the sector and increasing opportunities for women. The platform should follow an action-based approach, with targeted measures, and be supported by a website. The EESC also believes monitoring, evaluation and sharing of best practice will be essential tools to ensure its credibility and success.

The Vice-President of the Commission, Frans Timmermans, and the Commissioner for Transport, Violeta Bulc, have endorsed the initiative, which will be launched in November 2017. (mq) ●

## EESC consults EU civil society on white paper on the Future of Europe



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) will hold a series of national debates in 27 Member States to seek European civil society's views on the five scenarios for Europe's future development outlined by the European Commission in its *White Paper on the Future of Europe: Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025*.

Ideas, views and concerns expressed during the national debates by civil society organisations

from all walks of economic and social life will feed into the opinion the EESC is preparing on the White Paper following the referral by the Commission. The opinion will be adopted at the EESC plenary in July.

The debates during the month of May are part of an ongoing broad discussion about "the way ahead for Europe", initiated by European institutions across Europe and involving citizens, authorities and organisations alike. As the Commission has highlighted in its referral, the EESC has a key role to play in this process as the voice of organised civil society in the EU.

The White Paper offers five scenarios for how Europe could develop by 2025 in various areas, such as the single market and trade, migration and security, and economic and monetary union. (ll) ●

## How to strengthen the Commission's clean energy proposal



Policies to accelerate Europe's energy transition require more realistic planning, better consultation with consumers and clearer rules on how to enforce renewable energy targets. At its April plenary, the EESC approved five opinions on the Commission's Clean Energy for All Europeans package – a 1 000-page set of proposals that the Energy Union Commissioner, **Maroš Šefčovič**, said would "revolutionise" the sector.

While broadly welcoming the package, especially efforts to strengthen the role of energy consumers as self-supplying producers and new market participants such as local energy communities, the EESC anticipates major hurdles, particularly as the Commission intends to oversee each country's National Energy and Climate Plan.

"The EESC has deep concerns about the capacity of the governance process to enforce and deliver concrete results", states the general opinion on the package (TEN/624). "There is too great a reliance on consultations and peer pressure rather than clear rules". The EESC has called for further clarification on the way in which the Commission can require

Member States to take "necessary measures" in the event of a gap in ambition or implementation.

The Commission communication "puts energy efficiency first" and highlights its benefits in addressing energy poverty. The EESC's rapporteur, **Ulrich Samm** (Employers' Group – DE), also underlined the key role of energy efficiency, but argued that it was not "necessarily the first weapon you would choose to fight energy poverty".

The plan to create an Energy Poverty Observatory was welcomed, with the Committee noting that this reflected a 2013 proposal by **Pierre Jean Coulon**, now President of the EESC section responsible for energy (TEN).

EESC President, **Georges Dassis**, warned that the clean energy transition could not be "at the cost of certain groups of the population, particularly the disadvantaged".

Mr. Šefčovič said it was vital to champion the proposals, as the world was now looking to the EU to show the way forward. (dm) ●

## EESC says prior travel permits for visa-exempt third countries are necessary in current situation

The Commission's plan to set up a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) to strengthen security checks on visa-free travellers to the Schengen area is inevitable at present due to the current security situation, the EESC said at its last plenary.

In its opinion on the ETIAS, the EESC stressed that the information gathered through this system would enable more effective management of the Schengen borders but called on the Commission to address the issue of non-Schengen EU Member States.

"The system will allow for the prior verification of potential security or irregular migration risks to protect EU citizens against persons entering with ill intent," rapporteur **Jan Simons** (Employers' Group – NL) said. Although it may not be welcomed by everyone, the ETIAS will also bring benefits to



travellers such as reduced waiting time at Schengen borders. However, the EESC believes that the system should be implemented step by step and in open communication with the countries affected.

The ETIAS will apply to nationals from around 60 non-EU countries who are currently able to enter the Schengen zone without a visa. Under the system, which should become operational by 2020, travellers will have to apply online for a travel authorisation, which will function as a "lighter regime than the visa". The platform will then conduct automatic checks using EU information systems such as Interpol, Europol, the SIS and the EES, and grant or reject the authorisation on the same day. However, the final decision will still be made by national border guards.

The EESC welcomed the proposal but stressed that the ETIAS should fully respect fundamental rights and personal data protection, by making access to data only available to authorities investigating crime, terrorism, illegal immigration and other threats. (ll) ●

## Statement by the President of the EESC on Europe Day

Sixty-seven years ago, the foundations of the European Union were laid when, on 9 May 1950, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, embarked on a new path towards European integration by proposing that a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) be established. In the event, the ECSC was just the beginning, and a few years later the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 heralded the birth of the EU. Today we have an opportunity to celebrate and take stock of the EU's achievements, but at the same time to take a look both at our vision of the future and at the very real problems currently facing the people of Europe.

The truth of the matter is that the EU's success stories rarely get a mention, with its achievements all but sliding into oblivion. If we look at the past, though, we can only be proud of everything the EU has managed to accomplish. Peace, the chance to live in freedom, the free movement of people and goods and 50 years of economic and social progress are just some of the benefits that we have enjoyed and continue to enjoy

today. It is our duty to remind the world that these gains didn't just fall from the sky, and that we have the European Union to thank for them. Moreover, nothing can be taken for granted, not even peace.

In spite of everything, we have to admit that since 2009, some of the fundamental values of the EU, including that of solidarity, have fallen by the wayside. Again, the last few years have borne witness to a frightening increase in xenophobia, racism and fascist discourse, with nationalist and populist parties steadily gaining ground and appealing to ever wider audiences. In order to tackle the rapid rise in anti-European sentiment, however, the EU needs to take bold decisions to extricate itself from the impasse and the spiral of crises. We can only regain people's trust if policy-makers and leaders in the Member States take clear and meaningful steps to demonstrate that the EU is close to the people of Europe. It is shameful that in 2017 people in Europe are dying of hunger and the poor are getting poorer. We must all agree on the need for a social market

economy, involving measures to redistribute wealth and bolster the social dimension of our economic model.

With this in mind, the EESC has for quite some time been putting forward practical proposals such as the mutualisation of Member States' debt and a minimum guaranteed income for EU citizens. Furthermore, at the request of the Commission, the EESC will have the opportunity to draw up and table proposals on the future of Europe in the form of an opinion to be voted on in a few months' time, following the same model of consultation with the social partners in all the Member States that was successfully used for the opinions on the European Pillar of Social Rights and on addressing the migration crisis.

In conclusion, political decisions are urgently needed if Europe is to be united, democratic, solidarity-based, peaceful, prosperous and in touch with its citizens.

Georges Dassis  
EESC President



## EESC urges Commission to boost research and innovation budget



The findings of the stakeholder consultation carried out by the Commission in view of the mid-term evaluation of Horizon 2020 were revealed for the first time at a joint event by the EESC and the EC's RTD DG on 28 April.

The occasion was also an opportunity to compare these results with those of the recent EESC Information report drawn up by EESC Vice-President **Gonçalo Lobo Xavier** and the opinion by rapporteur **Ulrich Samm** (Employers' Group – DE).

"We welcome this initiative from the European Commission", commented Ulrich Samm "because this programme is very important for our future and the future of coming generations, and the EESC has been very much engaged in the evaluating process."

The conference reached the conclusion that Horizon 2020 was a successful innovation programme that brought together excellence, joint research infrastructures, cross-border collaboration and synergies between academia, industry, SMEs and research organisations. However, it was absolutely crucial to increase the budget for financing R&I at EU level and to widen participation whilst maintaining standards of excellence – a view shared by 89% of respondents.

On the question of financing, Ulrich Samm stressed: "The biggest problem we observed were the huge disparities in Europe. We have very different success participation rates in Horizon 2020 and there is a very clear correlation with the national funding. Those Member States that had stronger national funding were more successful, and those with smaller national funding were less so." (mr)

## EU tax rules are not currently prepared for the digital economy

European tax rules need to be adapted to reality in order to offer the people of Europe a more prosperous future. This was the main message of the EESC debate on Taxation of the Digital Economy held on 5th May.

"The digital economy is no longer just a part of the economy, but is becoming the actual economy itself", stated the keynote speaker, **Rita de la FERIA**, professor of Tax Law, University of Leeds, and renowned tax expert. "Digitalisation of the economy and globalisation are not reversible. Either we continue to fit reality in our law, patch measures, or try to adapt our rules and laws especially in areas of fraud – and offer prosperity to our people," she added.

**Joost van Iersel**, President of the EESC's ECO Section (Economic and Monetary Union), invited the taxation experts and economists participating to explore how the new models of business, work and consumption in the sharing economy

can be taxed appropriately. He recalled that the EESC considers proposals for appropriate taxation of the digital economy vitally important. Within its wider work on fair taxation, the EESC is preparing an opinion on the taxation of the sharing economy.

"Current taxation rules risk killing the sharing economy – which is actually good for increased productivity. They are also especially tough on small companies", stated EESC member **Krister Andersson** (Employers' Group – SE), "We need to adjust our tax rules accordingly in order to face the challenges and ensure that we realise all potential opportunities", he added.

"We need a more united taxation system in Europe. Our economy is not united to our territory, so we should treat it with one united European approach", said **Giuseppe Guerini** (Various Interests Group – IT), EESC rapporteur of Taxation of sharing economy. (mm)



Professor Rita de la FERIA at the debate on taxation of the digital economy

## Industrial and energy transition: the consequences of phasing out coal must be mitigated

On 7 April, the EESC's Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI) held a high-level debate on *Industrial and energy transition – the industrial, economic and social consequences*, bringing together energy experts from different coal-producing Member States, representatives of industry and trade unions, and EESC members.

The discussions revealed the challenges that coal mining regions and states face when coal mines close. For instance, in areas where coal is one of the few domestic sources of energy and where it



is an important source of employment, the energy transition can have a major impact.

However, participants agreed that there was an urgent need for a structured phasing-out of coal in Europe, in order to step into line with the agreed 2050 low-carbon goals and protect the environment and health. **Pierre Jean Coulon**, President of the EESC section responsible for energy (TEN) stressed that this process needed smart long-term strategies, focusing on the balance between the economic, environmental and social impacts. EESC member **Janusz Pietkiewicz** (Employers'

Group – PL) added that it was also necessary to transform consumers into active participants (prosumers).

Participants stressed that a change to renewables could be part of the solution. Regional investment schemes and the involvement of the local population, in order to build public support, were key to a successful transition.

EESC member **Dumitru Fornea** (Workers' Group – RO) put it in a nutshell: "We are not backward-looking. It is not about saving coal but saving our economy and jobs for our people. And this needs time, the support of all stakeholders, and communication with the people concerned". (sma)

## Proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights elicits a critical first reaction from employers' organisations

by the EESC's Employers' Group

The proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights elicited a critical first reaction from the secretaries general of UEAPME, EUROCHAMBRES and CEEP. Véronique Willems, Arnaldo Abruzzini and Valeria Ronzitti participated in the Employers' Group meeting to discuss their organisations' current priorities.

"The proposals focusing on work-life balance we have seen so far will greatly affect SMEs and add a cost burden," stated **Véronique Willems**, Secretary General of UEAPME. In UEAPME's view, the main focus should be on better implementation and enforcement

of existing rules instead of creating additional rights.

"We are very worried about the direction European policy is taking," said **Arnaldo Abruzzini**, Secretary General of EUROCHAMBRES, referring to the European Pillar of Social Rights. In his view, there was a tendency in the European Union to exploit the social aspect to the maximum, as politicians hoped that this would stop populism. He underlined that no social policy could be sustainable without growth and job creation. Jobs would not be created by social policy but by entrepreneurs, who needed a sound business environment conducive to growth.



Valeria Ronzitti (CEEP) and Arnaldo Abruzzini (EUROCHAMBRES)

For **Valeria Ronzitti**, Secretary General of CEEP, the Commission's proposals now had to be carefully analysed to arrive at a thorough and realistic assessment. According to Ms Ronzitti, employers would have an excellent opportunity to underline the importance of growth and jobs to the overall concept of the Social Pillar during the upcoming Social Summit in Gothenburg. (lj)

## Workers want concrete changes: a social Europe that works for people

by the EESC's Workers' Group

On 26 April 2017, the European Commission published its "social package", consisting of 17 different documents including proposals regarding a European Pillar of Social Rights. This is the Juncker Commission's first response to the trade union movement's demands.

There is an urgent need to address the social deficit by correcting the imbalance in social and economic policy and repairing the damage done to European society after so many years of austerity. Workers demand a social Europe that works for them, with concrete and enforceable rights.

The Workers' Group will analyse in detail the Commission's proposals,



which consist of a mix of legislative and non-legislative initiatives, to assess how these measure up to civil society's expectations and to the objectives we set out in the EESC's position on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

This is an opportune moment for us to reiterate that the workers of Europe are immensely proud of the European social acquis that we have been

instrumental in building, as well as the related enforceable social rights.

We will not support any attempts to weaken the social acquis by switching to mere principles and benchmarks.

The EU needs to provide a positive agenda for workers, which also addresses the challenges of the 21st century and Work 4.0. The Workers' Group has called for measures that will guarantee social progress, including: ensuring fair working conditions for all, a framework directive for minimum income, social security protection for all, respect for collective bargaining and trade union rights, and a common EU approach to the minimum wage.

If the EU fails to deliver, we will have to live with the consequences: increased nationalism, protectionism and xenophobia that could ultimately lead to its destruction. (mg)

## Luca Jahier at the Slovak Academy of Science for the future of Europe

by the EESC's Various Interests Group

On 18 April 2017 the Institute of Economic Research of the Slovak Academy of Science together with the International Club of Slovakia and the Economic Club of Slovakia organised an international conference in Bratislava entitled *The 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaty: the future of Europe*.

**Luca Jahier**, President of the European Economic and Social Committee's Various Interests Group, took part in the conference and presented civil

society's role in the future of Europe. He discussed the latest developments in Europe, including the upcoming elections in France, Brexit and the future role of civil society in the new paradigm of political and economic instability and geopolitical tension.

During the meeting, representatives from the EESC also set out the state of play of the European economy and the main challenges for its future development. Given the unprecedented ramifications of the global financial crisis and the deep global recession (particularly the debt crisis and its impact on



the real economy and employment), a comprehensive package to reform the economy both in the EU and the Eurozone was presented.

The conference came to the conclusion that Member States need to work together to overcome the problems and dangers, both external and internal, facing the European Union. (cl)

## IN SHORT

**"When we practise solidarity we can leave a trace in history", says Georges Dassis at the European Solidarity Forum**

On 12 April, EESC President **Georges Dassis** participated in the concluding session of the European Solidarity Corps Stakeholder Forum, alongside the President of the European Commission, **Jean-Claude Juncker**, and the President of the European Parliament, **Antonio Tajani**.

"When we practise solidarity, we achieve successes, sometimes so great that they can leave a trace in history", said Mr Dassis.

Mr Dassis welcomed the European Solidarity Corps initiative and underlined that "the EESC has asked for measures to be taken, under the European label, which are directly oriented

towards the daily life of citizens and have a social character. This battle will not be won by speeches but rather by actions that must be made known to the population".

"There is nothing smarter than to help someone else", said **Antonio Tajani**, who referred to the need for solidarity after natural disasters.

"We are still the richest part of the world, that's why we have to learn to share", said **Jean-Claude Juncker**.

Launched in September 2016, the initiative aims to give 18-30 year olds the chance to engage in projects to help those in disadvantaged situations. The EESC supports young citizens by continuing to promote the Civil Society Prize, while also annually organising the *Your Europe, Your Say!* youth event. Furthermore, on 18 May, the EESC celebrated 30 years of Erasmus+ by hosting a conference to mark the occasion. (ks)

## Open Day – 6 May 2017



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) – alongside the other European institutions – opened its doors to the public on Saturday 6 May. Committee members and staff welcomed more than 2 700 visitors, all eager to learn more about how the EESC works and the issues that we deal with.

The theme for the 2017 open day was the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Rome Treaty. Tours, information stands, interactive activities and live concerts were all on the menu. There was even a kids' corner to welcome the youngest visitors.

This unique opportunity to discover the diversity of Europe in a fun and family-friendly atmosphere was a great success. For more information about the day please take a look at our webpage: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/openday2017/> (nb)



EESC info in 23 languages: [http://www.eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/eescinfo/index\\_en.asp](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/eescinfo/index_en.asp)

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