EESC info
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Europe needs to do better for consumers, says the EESC

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Cross-border delivery tariffs can be almost five times higher than the domestic ones when receiving parcels from e-commerce companies abroad. Such differences cannot be justified by additional costs in the destination country and they deter consumers from buying in other Member States. In the EESC’s view, the Commission should set stringent deadlines for all parcel delivery services to lower their tariffs and should threaten to cap tariffs if they do not comply.

EU anti-money laundering measures need to cover all high-risk third countries

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Prosumer Energy: Opportunities and Challenges for the EU

Prosumers are the newcomers in today’s extremely complex energy market. They are individuals, households or cooperatives that both produce and consume energy, often at the local level. For example, they may generate energy using mini wind turbines, photovoltaic panels, solar collectors or heat pumps.

In its opinion on prosumer energy and prosumer power cooperatives, the EESC underlines the importance of introducing rules on the participation of these new players in the market in order to support their development, but also to avoid distorting competition. As prosumers generate energy for their own needs but often end up producing more, it is crucial to find a solution for surplus energy, in particular by promoting energy storage technology and improving interconnections between regions in Europe.

The EESC calls for a financial instrument to end “beaching”

“Beaching” is shipbreaking – cutting up vessels – in countries with weak or non-existent workers’ rights and safety rules, that pay wages of an estimated 3 € for a 12 to 16 hour working day.

For EESC member Martin Siecker (NL – Workers’ Group) and President of the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT), who acted as rapporteur of the EESC’s own-initiative opinion on Shipbreaking and the recycling society, this is an unacceptable situation: “We must put an end to this dangerous work, which not only exploits the poorest, but also puts their life in danger on a daily basis. It is the EU’s moral duty to defend workers’ basic rights abroad too.”

The EESC urges the Commission to come up with tougher legislation that recognises ship owners’ responsibility and duty to dispose of their ships in a decent way, calling for the “polluter pays” principle for ship owners. “If Europe wants its ships to be scrapped in a responsible way, it should ensure that the cost of doing so is factored into the operational cost of the vessel”, said co-rapporteur Richard Adams (UK – Consultative Commission on Industrial Change, Workers’ Category).

The EESC believes that prosumer energy should be an important element of an active policy to reduce energy poverty and protect socially vulnerable groups. It could also help strengthen regional economic development and address some of the issues connected with the ageing society and the silver economy. The involvement of civil society organisations as well as local and regional authorities will be key in this respect. (cad)

The EESC Civil Society Migration Prize to reward examples of human solidarity

The record number of 283 applications for this year’s EESC Civil Society Prize on Migration has clearly shown that migration and the integration of refugees continue to be a major area of action and concern for European civil society. The 2016 Prize will reward model and inspiring projects that represent the best of human solidarity in Europe and which have demonstrated real on the ground impact.

The EESC has shortlisted 5 applications from Hungary, Germany, Spain and Greece for the 2016 European Civil Society Prize on Migration. This year’s Prize is intended to go to individuals and organisations who have distinguished themselves through their work in improving the lives of migrants and fostering their integration in European society.

The shortlisted applications include:

- SOS Méditerranée, a German-led project which played a role in saving up to 5 000 lives at sea.
- Dionysis Arvanitakis, a Greek baker who took the initiative to distribute bread and pastries to thousands of hungry and desperate migrants in need.
- SOS Racismo Gipuzkoa – Gipuzkoako SOS Arrazakeria, a Spanish project which literally brought thousands of local residents and migrants to the table to eat and understand each other, and
- Amnistía Internacional, two projects which pioneered, respectively in Hungary and Greece, in assisting migrants and facilitating their social integration.

The winning projects will be announced in an award ceremony on 15 December at the EESC Plenary session in Brussels. Those selected will share a cash prize of 50 000 Euros in recognition for their work in order to give a much needed boost to their projects so that even more people can be helped. The Civil Society Prize, now in its eighth year, is awarded each year to an important area of the EESC’s activities.

Prosumer Energy: Opportunities and Challenges for the EU
Let’s trade and be better at communicating about it
The lessons of CETA
by Dilyana Slavova (BG – Various Interests Group), President of the EESC External Relations Section

Trade is good. Fair and transparent trade is even better. We have always done it. Trading was the main activity of prehistoric people, who bartered goods and services between each other before the invention of modern currency.

It gets a little more complicated when we turn to large-scale international trade agreements. The history of free trade agreements, the secrecy surrounding the negotiations, and leaked information about the actual agreement between all mean that there is tremendous potential for distrust and suspicion.

Need to protect the rule of law and fundamental rights says EESC

The EU is not just a single market; it is a union of common values that shape European identity. These values include human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity and the principles laid out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Respecting these rights, freedoms and principles is a prerequisite for accession to the EU, but there is no mechanism to enforce them when they come under attack in a Member State. In a new opinion, the EESC recommends going a step further to properly enforce the rule of law and democracy.

The EESC believes that article 51 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights should be amended to allow for a legally binding mechanism to monitor legality, hierarchy of norms, legal certainty, equality, non-discrimination, free access to justice and due process, prevention of abuse and arbitrariness by public authorities, protection of genuine human and social and cultural diversity, respect for freedom of speech of the press. In this way, shortcomings could be identified and remedial action called for.

A new pact for democracy should also be concluded to facilitate cooperation between EU institutions and Member States in upholding democratic values. The EESC, together with civil society organisations, and given the best possible living conditions within the United States. Transparency has to be at the very heart of all trade and investment agreements and democratic principles should be respected throughout the ratification process.

Discussions around CETA demonstrated a fundamental problem in communicating about trade. It is an illusion to think that in today’s connected and globalised world we can stop trading and close our markets. We cannot stop technological changes, development and innovation. What we need today is to shape trade liberalisation according to our values and adapt it to European citizens’ expectations.

Negotiating trade agreements is the EU’s responsibility because the leverage of granting access to the large EU market gives us better access to foreign markets. However, the Member States, together with the EU, should work more on the implementation of trade agreements and develop adjustment policies that correspond better to the challenges of every Member State in terms of social infrastructures and innovation. The benefits of trade are diffuse and they are not felt immediately, while the downsides of trade opening up might be abrupt and have an immediate effect.

EU Member States should reconnect with their citizens to present and explain

We cannot accept the decline of rural areas

Twenty years after the first Cork Declaration, the EESC together with the Committee of the Regions (CoR) held a conference on 9 November to discuss the European Commission’s new rural development strategy, which will build on the Cork 2.0 Declaration.

“If we don’t give prospects to young people by investing in infrastructures, separating growth and job creation in rural areas, we lose our most precious capital, our youth, and this is the beginning of the end of rural areas”, said Brendan Burns (UK – Employers’ Group), President of the EESC Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment.

However, 20 years after the first conference’s call for “a fairer distribution” of public spending and investments, the gap between rural and urban areas is still widening, not least because rural funding has decreased. The EESC calls for a strong territorial approach that sees the countryside and the city as mutually beneficial parts of a whole.

The EESC President Georges Dassis underlined his commitment to more vibrant rural communities, which can also play a critical role in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. He said: “It is high time for a strategic alliance between all stakeholders who promote a better tapping of rural areas’ potential. And this alliance must include not only the CoR and the EESC, but also the European Parliament.”

For more information: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-eu-chile-jcc-01 (mr)

First meeting of the EU-Chile Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee

On 4-5 October 2016, the EU-Chile Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), established under the EU–Chile Association Agreement (AA) no less than 11 years after the AA entered into force, held its first meeting.

The JCC is co-chaired by EESC member Lidija Pavic-Rogolíc (HR – Various Interests Group) and Miguel Santibáñez, coordinator of the Chilean NGO network, Acción. This first meeting aimed to set out the JCC’s mission and tasks, draft its rules of procedure and draw up a joint work programme based on topics of mutual interest.

The long-awaited establishment of the JCC comes at a crucial juncture in EU–Chile relations, with discussions underway to modernise the AA and include a chapter on trade and sustainable development in line with the free trade agreements negotiated recently. The EESC hopes that the JCC will play an active role in this process and become civil society’s sole advisory body in a future agreement.

For more information: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-eu-chile-jcc-01 (mr)

NEW PUBLICATION
The EESC’s first easy-to-read brochure for citizens with comprehension problems

What is the European Economic and Social Committee?

The EESC has just published its first easy-to-read brochure, intended for people with comprehension problems caused by a mental disability, limited education or other issues which might restrict their access to information. The brochure presents the EESC, its role, how it works and what it does in a straightforward way. The clear wording, font and formatting are in line with the recommendations set out in the guidelines for this type of publication. The brochure is available at: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.publications&itemCode=41049

Published in: EN, FR, DE

At COP22, the EESC campaigned for a key role for non-state actors in climate action

COP22 took place in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 7-18 November 2016. The Paris Agreement adopted at COP21 (which entered into force on 4 November 2016) set out the long-term goal of limiting global warming to “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels”.

Implementing the Paris Agreement will have a positive impact on the life of every European citizen. The road from Paris to a carbon-neutral economy is extremely challenging and the EESC sees climate action primarily as an opportunity to create new business and jobs and to enhance the well-being of EU citizens.

The EESC participated in COP22 as an observer in the official EU delegation in order to promote the concept of a new climate governance model with a crucial role to be played by non-state actors.

With this goal, the EESC and its partners – the CoR, Comité 21 France (C21F) and the CJS – decided to work together to set up a new international coalition on climate for multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, in order to give civil society its rightful role in climate action. (mr)

EESC delegation evaluated the situation of refugees with disabilities in Greece

A delegation of the EESC’s permanent study group on disabilities rights, including Ioannis Vardakastanis (EL – Various Interests Group), Bernard Noel (IE – Workers’ Group) and Dare Stojan (SI – Employers’ Group), visited Greece last October to assess the situation of refugees and other migrants with disabilities in the reception centres on Lesbos and in Athens. The visit was organised with the help of the Greek National Confederation of Disabled People.

Greek refugee camps currently accommodate 60,000 people, most of whom apparently plan to move to Germany or Sweden, but the closure of frontiers has transformed Greece from a mere place of transit to one for a longer stay. However, no data exists on the number of people with disabilities among the refugees.

Once identified, children and adults with disabilities are being accommodated in open reception centres, and given the best possible living conditions within the limits of each facility. Efforts have been made to make the reception sites housing disabled refugees accessible, but given the hilly terrain, remote locations and resource constraints, mobility and access certainly pose a challenge. The week before the visit saw the launch of a new programme aiming to get refugee children into schools. However no attention was paid to refugee children with disabilities.

The EESC will hold a hearing in February 2017 to present to other EU institutions and relevant stakeholders the main findings of this mission. (mm)
Civil society’s role in the European Energy Union discussed in Bratislava by the Various Interests Group

On 27 October 2016, the EESC Various Interests Group met in Bratislava to discuss The role of civil society in the European Energy Union: ensuring secure, sustainable, competitive and affordable energy.

Bringing together some 120 civil society representatives from Slovakia and the EESC, the conference was attended by the European Commission Vice President for the Energy Union, Maroš Šefčovič, and Vojtech Ferencz, Slovak State Secretary for the Economy. Opening the conference, Luca Jahier, President of the EESC Various Interests Group, urged all players to fully support the EU’s Energy Union, which, in his view, had the potential to become “the green equivalent of the European Coal and Steel Community of the 3rd Millennium”.

Mr Jahier went on to say that the Energy Union is without doubt an immense opportunity for growth and job creation in the EU and a positive instrument for European cooperation, cohesion, solidarity and trust. This view was echoed by Mr Šefčovič, who stressed that the Energy Union is a very consensual European project and that civil society, which is at the heart of European societies, must play its role in ensuring that the energy transition is fair and nobody is left behind.

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Strengthening European Growth and Competitiveness: Proactive Trade Agenda – NOW!

by the Employers’ Group

The role of trade as a generator of growth and jobs is undeniable, but public perception of trade liberalisation is deteriorating and citizens’ concerns must be addressed more effectively. This was one of the conclusions of the conference on Strengthening European Growth and Competitiveness: Proactive Trade Agenda – NOW! that took place in Helsinki on 26 October. The conference was organised jointly by the EESC Employers’ Group, the Confederation of Finnish Industries and ICC Finland.

It was emphasised that business organisations must make the argument for free trade; it cannot be taken for granted that people understand its benefits. Member States also have a key role to play in this regard: the mandate to negotiate trade deals given to the European Commission by Member States should only be granted after detailed domestic debates and support from national parliaments. Trade policy cannot be held hostage to national issues. Any concerns at national or even regional level should be discussed earlier in the process. The EU needs a proactive trade agenda for business, and regulation must support – not hamper – business growth.

The discussion in Helsinki was extremely timely as it took place during last-minute negotiations on CETA. Following the final agreement on the deal, the Employers’ Group President and the Finnish co-organisers issued a joint statement expressing support for free trade and stating that broad support for free trade from both employers and trade unions is possible when discussion is based on facts and figures and not on myths and fears.

Public investment in Europe: the EU can and must do more! by the Workers’ Group

Europe continues to suffer from a lack of investment, hampering economic recovery and social progress. Boosting economic recovery through public investment was the focus of the Workers’ Group extraordinary meeting on 30 November. Economist Achim Truger presented his study entitled Implementing the golden rule for public investment in Europe, explaining how public deficits can be justified if used for investment purposes. Participants discussed how such a rule could be successfully applied at EU level to allow greater flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact by excluding productive investment from national deficit and debt targets.

Researcher Chiara Crepaldi also presented a study examining possible synergies between public and private investment. The meeting was an opportunity to discuss progress on President Juncker’s Jobs, Growth and Investment Package, focusing on ideas for promoting EU investment policy and the Social Pillar initiative as instruments for securing sustainable and inclusive growth and as an alternative to austerity policies.

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EESC member Madi Sharma writes book to help turn 7 billion ideas into action

EESC member Madi Sharma (UK – Employers’ Group) has launched a crowdfunding campaign to finance the self-publication of her book Madi No Excuses! A survival of domestic violence turned successful entrepreneur, Madi aims to help everyone, especially disadvantaged individuals, to become change-makers, by developing their potential for entrepreneurship in the broader sense of the word. Entrepreneurship, as highlighted in the EESC opinion Creativity and entrepreneurship: mechanisms for climbing out of the crisis, is neither about money nor business plans: it is about ideas and translating these ideas into reality. For more information please visit http://madisharma.org/noexcuses/ (dm)

EESC member Thierry Libaert explores environmental communication

On 16 November a panel discussion was held at INSEEC Business School in Paris to mark the publication of La communication environnementale (Environmental Communication), a book edited by Madi, the EESC member Thierry Libaert (FR – Various Interests Group). Mr Libaert moderated the debate with some of the book’s contributors and other distinguished speakers.

The book, which is published by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), looks at how environmental communication has developed from its initial emergence in the 1990s following a series of environmental disasters to its mainstreaming into businesses’ and policymakers’ discourse. It also explores how environmental communication influences an organisation’s action, processes and operations with regard to the environment and how it shapes consumer behaviour.

SEASON WISHES

Dear readers,

We wish you all the very best for the Christmas season and a healthy and prosperous 2017.

We thank you for your interest and look forward to a new year full of exciting new challenges and opportunities as we prepare to move to a new online format in the coming months.

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