



# Europe III

The voice of Group III  
Various Interests  
July 2015



## Reshaping Europe: Civil Society's Perspective on the Europe of Tomorrow

ED  
Editorial



Luca JAHIER (IT)  
President of the Various Interests Group

*Do we need a new grand European project? How can we re-instil momentum into the EU? Should we launch a cultural revolution to reshape Europe? These are some of the questions that the Various Interests Group discussed during a conference at the EESC in Brussels, on 23 and 24 June 2015 alongside keynote speakers, MEPs Mercedes Bresso and Elmar Brok.*

*Bringing together approximately 180 individuals, both members of the Various Interests Group and external guests, the event sought firstly, to take stock of the work of the Group over the last five years. Secondly, to build on what we have already achieved and to jointly explore how to shape the Europe of tomorrow. As I stated during the inaugural session of the conference, the question today is whether we have been able to define and to implement a winning strategy, for both the Group and the EESC? Secondly, what are the future perspectives for our work? Thirdly, how can we ensure that civil society is able and does indeed influence the Europe of Tomorrow? For ultimately, this last question is at the heart of our role and our responsibility as members of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).*

*Over the last five years, our Group has focussed on three principal themes. Firstly, the necessity for sustainable growth and investment in Europe, which is founded on a wide range of actors including SMEs, the Liberal Professions, social enterprises, farmers, etc. That is to say, stakeholders who are at the very heart of our economies and societies, and who have demonstrated their resilience during the crisis. Secondly, we have focussed on the importance*

*of rebalancing European debates and policies and of investing more in a social, sustainable and inclusive Europe. For example, via social innovation, social investment, the social economy and active citizenship with a renewed protagonism for local communities. Thirdly, we have stressed that it is crucial for European civil society to have an active role in the entire legislative process, from formulation, to implementation and evaluation.*

*These are not only the convictions of our Group, but they are also enshrined in the EU Treaties and reiterated by our political leaders. Not only does Article 3 of the TEU state that the EU should balance economic efficiency with equity, social and territorial cohesion. But in addition, the conclusions of the meeting of the Council in June 2014 stipulated that the EU is 'A Union that empowers and protects all citizens'. What we have been trying to do in the last few years, through EESC Opinions, Group seminars, conferences, the work of the Categories, etc., is to come up with proposals on how to move from theory to action and results.*

*However, at the centre of the work of the Various Interests Group since 1999, has been the emphasis on participatory democracy. In 2011 we tried to collect all this work that we had done on the subject through a publication, the 'Compendium on Participatory Democracy'. I would like to take this occasion to thank the three former Presidents of our Group and of the EESC who really pushed this agenda: Beatrice Rangoni Macchiavelli, Anne-Marie Sigmund and Staffan Nilsson. However, it is neither the place nor time to*

*reiterate all the work that we have done on this topic. Suffice to say that there has been little real ambition by the European Institutions to fully exploit the potential of Article 11 of the TEU. There has been very limited implementation and indeed, there seems to be some contradiction in the approach of the European Commission, which is multiplying fora and so-called expert panels, instead of making better use of the EESC, which can provide expertise, representativity and consensus-building.*

*What is necessary today and what the EESC could offer, is a structure and an infrastructure to implement Article 11 of the TEU. What we need is a forum for stable, semi-permanent and structured dialogue with socio-economic actors and wider civil society, both in Brussels and in the Member States. The EESC has already played this role in a number of policy areas, for example, the European Migration Forum, Energy Forum, Rio plus 20, TTIP negotiations and the Europe 2020 Strategy. This is not to say that the Committee would have the monopoly in the consultations. That would not be possible technically and would be unwise politically. But the EESC could and should take a leading role in providing a framework for these consultations and in cooperating with the European Institutions to make this a reality.*

*Our conference on 23 & 24 June provided the opportunity to revisit all of the above, both through the discussions in the plenary and the fifteen thematic workshops. What we witnessed was the richness, energy, creativity, innovation and determination of the various members and components of our Group, who over the last five years*

*have presented civil society's response to the crisis. We have demonstrated that we don't want a traditional reactive role, but that we can go much further, bringing new ideas, initiatives and dialogue, bridging the local and European levels.*

*The concrete output from our event will be the publication in September of proposals for next steps in the work of the Various Interests Group. Secondly, the discussions at our conference will directly feed into the study commissioned by the EESC to Bertelsmann Stiftung and which will also be published in September.*

*I would like to end this Editorial by commenting that Europe does need a new narrative or vision, but one which will bring together the ideas of Today and the values of the Past, values which include solidarity, belonging, sharing, etc. In European Thinking, Values and Decisions we have always been in the shadow of History, which is precisely what challenges and enriches the European Union and makes me personally very proud to be a citizen of this continent. I fear that the younger generations do not always share this respect for History and gratitude for what it is to live in peace and democracy. Every generation needs a new narrative for Europe and I do not think that this generation has found it yet. So let us join our forces, let us build bridges, let us strive forward and jointly reshape the Europe of Tomorrow!*

**Luca JAHIER,**  
**President of the Various Interests Group of the EESC**

## News from Group III



### Feedback from the Edinburgh Seminar 'Boosting Innovation for a Better Social Outcome' - 23 May 2015

(On the right) Maureen O'NEILL (UK) with Shula ALLAN, Chairperson of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

#### Impressions from Maureen O'Neill:

"As an EESC member from the voluntary sector in Scotland it was a pleasure to be able to welcome colleagues to Edinburgh to discuss the role of social innovation and how the sector is performing. This conference follows on from the one held in Milan during the Italian Presidency and provided a further opportunity to debate the role of civil society in supporting welfare needs and the continued role of the state.

Some key themes emerged from the lively debate in the roundtables which complemented the excellent keynote speakers who developed the agenda.

- The autonomy of civil society is fundamental and it should be the voice of the many
- Investment in social needs is vital to maintain cohesion and vitality in society
- Civil society organisations have been a key to innovation and through partnership can deliver services across the range of need
- The role of the social economy is intrinsic to continued development based on ethical values but delivering on economic ones
- A strong emphasis on participation and co-production at community, regional, national and EU level
- There needs to be a longer term focus on evolving different models of social support; on developing funding mechanisms which are sustainable; on policy development and participative structures
- Ensuring that there is a clear and adequate social protection system must underpin innovative models of support.

It is a topic which needs debate in different Member States to really form a view of where the commonalities and differences exist. It is not about creating a one-size-fits-all approach but as to how we learn from each other."



Vice-President of the Various Interests Group Ariane RODERT (SE) making her presentation in Edinburgh

#### Impressions from Ariane Rodert:

"The event was the next step in the Group III process of working with the recommendations of the Milan Declaration to discuss its relevance and couple it to local realities. The event successfully gathered different stakeholders and perspectives to give direction and next steps. With participants spanning from social entrepreneurs, to policy makers and academics it was a very dynamic discussion. It also demonstrated the key role the

event successfully gathered different stakeholders and perspectives to give direction and next steps. With participants spanning from social entrepreneurs, to policy makers and academics it was a very dynamic discussion. It also demonstrated the key role the

EESC plays in bridging local realities to EU policy issues giving us a very crucial "reality check" and future direction. The conclusions from the meeting were clear; the social economy and civil society at large have a even greater role play in reforming and rejuvenating the welfare models. The need for a specific support system to unleash this potential is central since many instruments today do not fit the models of civil society and social economy. It also confirmed that despite national contexts and diversity there are many common elements, challenges and opportunities demonstrating a key role for the EESC to continue to work on this agenda to secure more supportive EU Policy initiatives in this area."

More about the Milan event can be found here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-boosting-innovation-milan>

Following the Seminar, the members were given a guided tour of the Scottish Parliament.



Group III delegation visiting the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, with President Jahier, centre right flanked by our host Ms Christina McKelvie MSP



The main chamber of the Parliament

### Save the date...



## Highlights of the May 2015 EESC Plenary Session

### Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "Action Plan on Fairer Corporate Taxation" – ECO/383.

Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO) is the Co-Rapporteur for the opinion on: "A European Agenda on Migration" – SOC/525.

Thomas PALMGREN (FI) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Strengthening the European chemical industry's innovative capacity and competitiveness through nanotechnology" – CCMI/140.

Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES) is the President for the own-initiative opinion on: "Digital Single Market

Strategy" – TEN/574.

Lydia PAVIĆ ROGOŠIĆ (HR) is the President for the Joint Consultative Committee on: "EU-Chile" – REX/JCC.

Ariane RODERT (SE) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Building a financial eco-system for social enterprises" – INT/770.

Luca JAHIER (IT) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Improving the functioning of the European Union building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty" and "Possible evolutions and adjustments of the current institutional setup of the European Union" – GAH T. Lis.



The full listing of membership of the study groups for the new work may be consulted here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3-new-study-groups>

### JUST FOR A LAUGH!



### Quote of the month...



"Seven social sins: politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, and worship without sacrifice."

Mohandas Karamchand "Mahatma" Gandhi (1869-1948)

Non-violent pacifist, political and spiritual leader, "Father" of Indian Independence

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma\\_Gandhi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi)

## Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

### LET'S COOPERATE ON AN ACTION PLAN FOR JOB CREATION

MEPs, social service providers and policy makers convened at the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels on 26 March 2015 to work together on how to put social investment back on the European Commission's agenda. The breakfast session was organised by Social Services Europe, which brings together eight Europe-wide networks of not-for-profit social service providers. Through its membership, Social Services Europe represents over 100,000 organisations active in promoting social inclusion and cohesion across Europe.



In a context where unemployment and poverty levels are so high, the Commission's 2015 Work Plan is failing to adequately consider the crucial need for social investment. Guest speakers discussed solutions to tackle this agenda change, as well as the additional challenges faced across the social and health care sector.



The breakfast meeting was hosted by Ariane Rodert (SE), Vice-President of the Various Interests Group of the European Economic and Social Committee, who underlined the timeliness of acting now and collaborating more closely to improve the conditions for non-profit service providers. "We need to have a joint action plan and ownership", she said, observing the fragmented nature of the new Commission when it comes to social issues. "We need strong social policies also to support Europe and the social and economic dimensions must be in harmony", she added.

To read a fuller report and what the other contributors had to say, please see here: <http://www.socialserviceseurope.eu/#social-service-providers-contribution-t/cv7v>



(On the right) Kinga JOO (HU)  
Member of the Various Interests Group

### "PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CONTACTS ARE KEY"

This was one of the main conclusions which emerged from a Capacity Building Seminar on the European Semester Modelling the Hungarian and Belgian

European Semester cycles held in Brussels on 14 April 2015. Group III member Kinga Joó represented the EESC and a local NGO Hungarian Large Families Association (NOE), of which she is Vice-President. The seminar aimed to bring together the various member organisations of COFACE, EU level stakeholders, Belgian and Hungarian civil society organisations etc. and through the presentation of the European Semester cycles of Hungary and Belgium introduce the EU semester process, present the roles of the various institutions and actors in the procedure, and seek further the ways of civil society engagement in the cycle's procedures. A total of 65 participants registered and attended the seminar representing local NGOs, think-thanks, regional and national level governments, EU level umbrella civil society platforms etc. In addition, 10 organisations from the membership of COFACE participated in the seminar.

A full overview of the main outcome of the seminar can be read here: [http://www.coface-eu.org/en/upload/EU\\_Semester/European%20Semester%20Seminar%20Report.pdf](http://www.coface-eu.org/en/upload/EU_Semester/European%20Semester%20Seminar%20Report.pdf)

More information on COFACE website: <http://www.coface-eu.org/en/Events/European-Semester/>



Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)  
President of the NAT Section  
Member of the Bureau of the Various Interests Group

### GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE: A EUROPEAN SUCCESS STORY

On 5 May the NAT Section of the EESC in cooperation with the Committee of the region conducted a Conference Green Infrastructure: a European Success Story. More than 200 external participants participated in the event. The Conference aimed at presenting progress with the implementation of the Green Infrastructure Strategy and to renew political commitment to the objectives of this strategy. Commissioner Karmenu Vella presented progress in the European Commission's Green Infrastructure strategy. Members of both Committees, policy makers, businesses, civil society and authorities contributed with their views. The conference also presented best practices on how local and regional authorities as well as participative planning processes can boost the social, economic and environmental benefits from Green Infrastructure to European citizens.

Green Infrastructure enables nature to deliver its many benefits to people by way of ecosystem services, such as water and air purification, flood protection, health benefits, soil fertilisation or carbon storage. The European Green Belt is an outstanding example of a Green Infrastructure running the length of Europe. But Europe also has many other Green Infrastructure projects, from the local to regional and national to cross-border levels, in urban and rural settings.

Investment in healthy ecosystems provides excellent opportunities for territorial development, green growth and employment. In urban areas, green roofs and walls, parks, community gardens and green walking paths contribute to biodiversity, tackle climate change and enhance the wellbeing of residents. In rural areas, hedgerows, stone walls, ponds, wildlife strips, small woodlands, riparian forests and grasslands form elements of Green Infrastructure. They create not only attractive extensive agricultural and forest landscapes, but provide clean water, enhance pollination, protect against soil erosion and increase pest control. Green Infrastructure is a most efficient tool for disaster prevention: forests with a good mix of species, age and structure absorb large quantities of water and protect the soil, preventing floods and landslides.



### ARIANE RODERT: BULGARIA IS ONE OF THE FEW COUNTRIES THAT HAVE A CONCEPTION AND AN ACTION PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

In the EU around 14 million people are employed in social enterprises. Students from the University of National and World Economy (UNWE) and the St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo, representatives of ministries and NGOs met today at the UNWE and debated on the theme "Opportunities for development of social entrepreneurship in 2014 -2020 - Creating employment for young people" together with guest lecturer and Vice-President of Group III at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) Ariane Rodert. Mrs. Rodert was in Bulgaria at the invitation of the Bulgarian Economic and Social Council (ESC) and this is not her first in Bulgaria. In the framework of the intensive and fruitful cooperation between EESC and the Bulgarian ESC she was involved in several initiatives held in Bulgaria. This forum addressed to the students is part of the series of meetings and discussions initiated by the Bulgarian ESC and organised inside the country which are devoted on the role of the social entrepreneurship and social economy.

Organisers of the forum are the Economic and Social Council of Bulgaria and the University of National and World Economy, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. In the forum also took part the Prof. Lalko Dulevski who is ESC President and Member of Group III of EESC and the Rector of the UNWE Prof. Statty Stattev. Clarifications for policies and employment opportunities in social enterprises were presented to the students by representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Economy.



Bulgaria is one of the few European countries which has developed conception and action plan for the development of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship, stated Ariane Rodert. She determined the social economy as an important priority for the EU and outlined the steps needed at national and pan-European level: political will and legislative definition of social economy and enterprises and also making a clear distinction between ordinary

business and social entrepreneurship, which is not based on a purely commercial basis; accesses to finance for social enterprises; study of practices and analyses; not least - recognition of the social entrepreneurs for the benefits to society. Achieving sustainability and creating networks of social enterprises are challenges for Bulgaria as well as for the EU, said also Mrs. Rodert. During the discussion it became clear that 14 million people in the European Union work in social enterprises. Ariane Rodert highlighted the emphasis in the EESC's work on the development of the social entrepreneurship.

The European Commission has declared the social economy as a priority and allocated special funds for its development in the next period up to 2019. The question before us is if we would be able to realize the importance of the social economy and the social entrepreneurship as well as how we should organise ourselves well enough to be able to gain accesses to the funds and make them work in the interest of the society. This was statement by Prof. Lalko Dulevski, President of the Economic and Social Council of Bulgaria during the opening of the discussion at the University of National and World Economy. The social economy is aimed at solving the problems of people where the state or the market could not resolve them, explained Prof. Lalko Dulevski, adding that the role of social enterprises and social entrepreneurs will play an increasingly large role. ESC adopted numerous acts paying attention to the problems in the field of social entrepreneurship and social economy, said Prof. Dulevski and added that ESC organized a series of discussions in the country on this topic. The interest to the new opportunities in this field is growing incessantly, noted Prof. Dulevski.

The representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Economy introduced the participants with the new opportunities for financing within the operative programmes. It became clear that around 2000 non-financial enterprises "identify" themselves as "social enterprises" and employ around 30,000 people. Representatives of already functioning social enterprises and foundations, which are funding social activities, have underlined the need for broad discussion on the future of social entrepreneurship. The Student club of young entrepreneurs declared that there is a great interest for social entrepreneurship among young people, but they need more concrete information on financing and starting capital.

"Save the Bulgarian traditions in the field of social enterprises because Bulgaria has over 100 years of tradition in this field in the face of the cooperatives", advised the Vice-president of Group III at the EESC Ariane Rodert, in her concluding remarks.

## Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 27-28 May 2015 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.



**Gunta ANČA (LV) – SOC/517** "Long-term social care and deinstitutionalisation" (EESC opinion 7336/2014)

In this exploratory opinion, requested by the Latvian Presidency, the EESC:

- calls for awareness of the situation of people living in institutions to be raised, through consistent and disaggregated data, and for human rights indicators to be established;
- calls on Member States to put anti-discrimination measures in place and to promote the right of people with disabilities to participate fully in society and the economy, as part of National Reform Programmes (NRPs);
- recommends that Member States use European Structural and Investment Funds to promote the transition from institutional to community-based care, to develop social and health services and to train support services staff;
- recommends that Member States reform long-term care on the basis of cost-effectiveness analysis, adopting a long-term approach which includes investing in people and services instead of cutting financial resources;
- highlights that "deinstitutionalisation" is a process which requires a long-term political strategy and the allocation of adequate financial resources to develop alternative support services in the community;
- recommends that professionals throughout Europe be trained to work in community-based services and that they be informed about the deinstitutionalisation process;
- recommends that community-based services be available locally and that they be affordable and accessible for all;
- recommends that partnerships be built between all stakeholders involved in the deinstitutionalisation process; and
- urges the Member States to establish independent and efficient inspection and monitoring services, to ensure compliance with regulatory and quality standards for care services.



**Ludvik JÍROVEC (CZ) – CCMI/129** "An EU Industrial Policy for the Food and Drinks Sector" (EESC opinion 5388/2014)

The European food and drink industry will have to develop its strategy for growing in an environment of modest economic growth, less natural resources, structurally high commodity and energy prices and difficult access to capital. In this context, the sector has to be geared to meet the challenges ahead. This EESC opinion targets key policy areas that need to be addressed to create a more business-friendly environment. These should enable the food and drink industry to achieve a sustainable growth, innovate and create jobs whilst continuing to provide consumers with safe, nutritious, high quality and affordable food. The EESC strongly favours a sector-specific industrial policy for the European food and drink industry tailored to its specific needs. It believes that this can be achieved through a renewed mandate of the High Level Forum for a better functioning supply chain for the period 2015-2019 whose mandate came to an end on 31 December 2014.

The EESC draws the attention of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council and Member States' governments, to the priority areas listed below for the further progress of the European Food and Drinks Industry.

#### Progress on completion of Internal Market:

The EU Commission and Member States should work towards completing a Single Market ensuring the free movement of food and drink products. This is a precondition to improve the competitive performance of food and drink companies in the EU.

#### International facilitation of trade in foods and drinks:

EU negotiating strategies at international level should seek to eliminate tariffs for EU exports and facilitate trade through the implementation of internationally recognised standards in the countries with the highest trade expansion potential. Initiatives by the food and drink sector itself aimed at strengthening human resources and consolidating employment. There is a crying need for the industry itself to improve its image especially with young people.

The need to recruit a higher quality of human resources should notably be backed by more high quality sector-based labour market information available across Member States and apprenticeship programmes. The EESC encourages the establishment of a food KIC (Knowledge and Innovation Community) in the food and drink sector.

#### Ensuring a sustainable food supply chain:

The EESC would like to see a holistic plan towards the achievement of sustainability of the food chain. The EESC calls on the Commission to adopt a Communication on "Sustainability of Food Systems".

#### Food waste:

The EESC reiterates its opinion affirming the need for a definition, a common and globally aligned EU methodology to quantify food losses and food waste, including recycling and recovery of unsold food. Any future industrial policy for the food and drink sector should reflect a balanced approach and address food wastage prevention.

#### Supply chain fair practice:

The EESC and welcomes the efforts that have been undertaken by both distributors and food and drink manufacturers for developing a voluntary initiative to promote fair business relations along the food supply chain (SCI - Supply Chain Initiative).

#### R&D and innovation:

The EESC believes there is a need for R&D to be clearly targeted and for industry to be a key partner in identifying how this should be done.

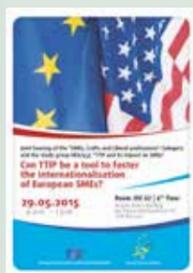
#### SMEs in the food and drink sector:

The EESC believes that special attention should be given to the specific needs of SMEs, in particular to reduce the administrative burden.

NOTE: The complete texts of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's website:  
<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.opinions-search>



## OUR GROUP'S STRENGTH



The SMEs, Crafts and Professions Category organised a joint public hearing with the External Relations Section (REX) on 29 May 2015 on: "Can TTIP be a tool to foster the internationalisation of European SMEs?" in the framework of preparation of the EESC opinion on "TTIP and its impact on SMEs" (REX/433) of which

Panagiotis Gkofas (EL), spokesperson of the Category, is Co-Rapporteur. The hearing aimed at debating the following questions:

- main obstacles to the internationalization of SMEs;
- main barriers encountered by SMEs exporting and investing in the EU and the US;
- actions to be taken in order to facilitate SMEs' participation in transatlantic trade and investment and to help SMEs to benefit more from trade agreements;
- how to best address SMEs' needs and expectations from trade agreements;
- what can be the impact of trade agreements, and TTIP in particular on exporting and non-exporting European SMEs

Members of the study group and of the Category had the opportunity to receive first-hand information and impressions on negotiations and the challenges ahead from, amongst other, Lucien Cernat, DG Trade Chief economist, Peter Chase, Vice-President for Europe of US Chamber of Commerce, Wojciech Sopinski, DG GROW policy officer, Luc Hendrickx, Ralph Kamphöner and Arnaud Petit for UEAPME, EUROCOMMERCE and COPA-COGECA respectively.

In his concluding remarks, Panagiotis Gkofas mentioned the need of more support from the EU and the US to national SMEs organisations to inform and help members to go international and called for the creation of a database of

all the administrative and regulatory elements to export in both directions. TTIP should be seen as a first step to set up stable trade relationships between developing countries and difficulties linked to lowering standards on safety and consumer protection could be overcome if trust and confidence are in place.

Two weeks later, the spokesperson of the Category participated and followed-up on the issues discussed during the meeting in a European High Level Round Table with MEPs, representatives of the European Commission and the US Ambassador to the EU Anthony L. Gardner on: "TTIP: perspectives for European and American SMEs" organised by CNA (Confederazione Nazionale dell'Artigianato e della PMI) in the European Parliament.

The programme is available here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-ttip-impact-smes-programme>

The "Consumers and Environment" Category met on Thursday 4 June 2015. After some words of welcome from the spokesperson, Group III member Reine Claude Mader (FR), the day's work began with a discussion on possible themes for the European Consumers' Day in 2016. Next, Despina Spanou, DG JUST.E, gave an overview of the new Commission's legislative plans in the area of consumer policy. Her presentation was followed by a debate with the members. Then, the Rapporteur for the opinion, INT/768 "Delegated acts", Group III member Jorge Pegado Liz (PT), updated the members on the work in progress so far of the study group, in the presence of representatives of the European Commission.

The programme is available here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.categories-consumers-environment-documents>



On 11 June 2015, the "Farmers" Category held a joint meeting with the REX Section. The Section President, José María Zufiaur (GR-II), chaired the opening session and welcomed the participants. The first discussion panel focussed on the main theme, with presentations of some case studies. Contributions included: "Farmers fighting poverty", by Ignace Coussements, Secretary-General of AGRICORD; "The case for forestry" by Juha Ruippo, Finnish Agri-agency for Food&Forest Development (member of AGRICORD) and "Land sustainable management" by Ousmane N'Diaye, Director of ASPRODEB. Members then had an opportunity to pose questions.

The second thematic debate centred around "Agricultural development: the main challenges". In this panel, which was followed by a Q & A session, presentations were made by Regis Meritan of the DG DEVCO/C1 (Rural Development, Food Security, Nutrition) and Mustapha Sinaceur, Director of FAO Liaison Office in Brussels.

Category spokesperson, Group III member, Yves Somville (BE) closed the meeting with his conclusions on the day's discussions and perspectives for the future.

The programme is available here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.categories-farmers-meetings.35980>

The Social Economy Category will meet on 8 July 2015. Following some words of welcome from the category Spokesperson, Miguel Ángel CABRA DE LUNA (ES), the members will formally adopt the 2015 Work Programme. Then there will be an exchange of views with Jakub Cebula, Member of Commissioner Bienkowska's Cabinet. Next, Professor Lowitzch of the University of Viadrina in Frankfurt will give a presentation of the Virtual Tool on Employee Financial Participation.

Finally, the members will have two consecutive debates with representatives of the European Commission: Baudouin Baudru, Member of Commissioner Thyssen's Cabinet and Michel Catinat, Head of Unit F2, Clusters, Social Economy and Entrepreneurship, DG GROWTH.

