



Europe III

The voice of Group III
Various Interests
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WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE WELLNESS OF EUROPE

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Editorial

Luca JAHIER (IT)
President of the Various Interests Group

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Last month we instated the members of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) for the five year mandate 2015-2020, we paid tribute to past and new Presidents, Vice-Presidents and members. Together, we are now committed to putting at Europe's service all of our energy, creativity and expertise, to help build trust and improve communication between Europe's citizens and the EU. Our journey during the next few years will be both challenging and rewarding. However, what is certain is that when this term of office comes to an end, we must have left a clear civil imprint behind us!

To achieve this, we will need to be both proud of our achievements and ambitious for the future. We certainly have achieved a great deal during the previous mandate. Three key words come to my mind: 'collegiality', 'innovation' and 'teamwork'. I hope that you will agree that during these years we have ensured a voice for the diverse interests represented in our Group, we have brought to the fore new topics and policy agendas and we have worked constructively together as a team. Crucially, we have raised the profile of the myriad of protagonists who compose European civil society and who have demonstrated their resilience and

capacity to innovate during the crisis in Europe. For example, the SMEs, social economy actors, farmers, environmentalists, liberal professionals, the disability sector, voluntary, youth and gender-equality associations, academia, to name but a few. All of these actors are striving for a new approach in Europe: one of investment, social innovation, inclusion, sustainable development and enhanced competitiveness. For let us not forget what is clearly stated in Article 3(3) of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU): the EU shall "...work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress..." Collectively, we are the actors who can bring these ideals to fruition.

The effective involvement of civil society in European policy-making is central to this process and as members of the EESC we should be aware of the force that we represent, both as a Group and as a Committee. We need to draw on all of our skills, expertise and networks to re-open communication channels and rekindle citizen's confidence in our common European project. Some would argue that the multiple crisis facing Europe over the last few years have led to the disillusionment of our common vision of the EU, leaving only unbridled

national interests. Without doubt, there is some truth in this. However, when faced with challenges of the scale that we have over the last few years, it has to be said that the EU has been able to react, revise and rejuvenate itself, in order to ensure the survival of the European project.

In this respect, the role of the EESC is crucial. For in the European Treaties, participatory democracy is clearly identified as an integral dimension of the democratic system. One only has to peruse Articles 9, 10, 11 and 12 of the TEU on European citizenship, the role of the European Parliament, of active citizenship and of the national parliaments, which are collectively referred to as the 'Democratic Principles' of the EU. If we add the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, then we have at our disposal an entire spectrum of instruments to make Europe more transparent, effective and accountable.

Placing the EESC more at the centre of this Europe of citizens, this Europe of dialogue and of the future, will be our principal objective over the next five years. To achieve this, we must be able to propose solutions based on our own national experiences. For there is a great range of instruments for civil society participation at the European level, which have varying degrees of effectiveness. My call to all

of you, is to make the EESC more relevant to both citizens and the European Institutions, to capture and mobilise the strengths of our diversity and innovation, in order to bring our Committee more to the fore. Perhaps also in the future, we will need to concentrate our work on key areas, despite our diversity. What is certain, is that as a Group, we will need to continue to invest in leadership, innovation and dialogue, to reinforce the Committee internally and hence externally, in order to reposition the EESC to the heart of European civil dialogue as a facilitator and an actor.

I would like to end this Editorial by commenting that I hope that we will be able to rapidly integrate the 47 new members of our Group and to strive forward united. Together, we must better apply the instruments which are already available and improve their implementation. Together, we must uphold and act upon our responsibilities as representatives of European civil society. If we do not take up the gauntlet to achieve this, then nobody will do it in our place. I sincerely hope that each and every day we can transform the energy and capacity of each of us, each 'I' into a collective 'We', for the wellbeing of civic dialogue. Let us be creative, when 'I' is replaced by 'We', even illness becomes wellness!

SPECIAL FEATURE

2015-2018 half-mandate – a new team full of leadership and talent and an impressive dynamic gathering of new expertise



Once, again, at the outset of this new mandate 2015-2020, we warmly welcome our 47 new members who, we are certain, will bring their own personalities, experiences and skills to bear on the shape, ethos and future work of the Various Interests Group.

We also have a new Presidency team:
Allow me to introduce them to you!

Vice-Presidents and their Portfolios



Benedicte FEDERSPIEL (Denmark)

- Consumer influence, representation and protection
- Trans-Atlantic Trade Agreement (TTIP)



Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (Lithuania)

- Rural Development & Agriculture
- Bio-economy
- Renewable Energy
- Sustainable Food
- Satellite Technology



Arno METZLER (Germany)

- SMEs
- Liberal Professions
- Rules of Procedure



Ariane RODERT (Sweden)

- Social Economy
- Civil dialogue
- Volunteering, NGOs and Voluntary Organisations
- Social Innovation



Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (Greece)

- Fundamental Rights & Non-discrimination
- Social Inclusion
- Social and Economic Pillars of Sustainable Development

SPECIAL FEATURE

2015-2018 half-mandate – a new team full of leadership and talent and an impressive dynamic gathering of new expertise

Next, our hard-hitters in key top positions at the EESC:



Michael SMYTH (UK)

Vice-President of the EESC
in charge of Budgetary Affairs

I am honoured to take up the responsibility as Vice President for the Budget. In preparation for the new mandate I was fortunate to have the opportunity to follow Hajo Wilms's work as Chair of the Budget Group closely over the last few months, and I have been truly impressed by his calm, consensual and commonsensical approach to the task, with the good support of his fellow Budget Group members and, of course, the Secretariat. I hope I will be able to continue and build on the excellent work Hajo has done and I am personally delighted to find that Hajo will stay on the Budget Group, so he will be there to keep me honest and up to the task.

I am looking forward to the work within the Budget Group, whose working methods are embedded in perhaps one of the greatest assets of this Committee: the so-called "dynamic compromise", which just means that we have to talk – and listen – to each other.

On the subject of talking, if any of you colleagues want to approach me about budget matters, my door is always open to you. We will meet, we will discuss the problem thoroughly; I will listen carefully and I then will say "NO" to your request – but in a very cordial and civilised manner.

As an economist, I am particularly happy to have been put in charge of the coffers of the Committee, a task I will obviously undertake in close cooperation with and under the supervision of the other members of the Budget Group and, in the final event, the bureau. Over the last nine years I have gained a reasonably good knowledge of the financial workings of this house, particularly during my tenure of the Presidency of the ECO Section. In addition for some time I have acted as Honorary Treasurer and latterly as Chair of a Housing Association in Belfast, handling assets and budgets in the tens of millions and I am sure I can draw on my knowledge of financial accounts in this new position. I shall certainly do my best to meet any – reasonable – expectations you may have of the chair of the Budget Group.

I shall not make any big, lengthy statements. I would just like to point out that I see it as my duty to ensure that the work of the Budget Group stays strictly within the framework set out by the Committee's Rules of Procedure and its implementing provisions. We have a number of well-defined tasks, one of which is to participate in the drawing-up of the Committee budget. We shall ensure that the budget is properly implemented and accounted for, which entails a fair deal of monitoring. And our decisions must be governed by a number of principles, including sound financial management and transparency. I invite you all to have a look at rule 10 of the Rules of Procedure.

In terms of the Committee as a whole and the new mandate, in line with the political guidelines proposed by president Georgios Dassis I would like to see a much stronger focus on social issues. It is particularly important that young people do not become mere bystanders but are provided with the skills and the opportunities needed to forge a life for themselves. No more lost generations!

Social entrepreneurship is an area where I see a particular potential. And concerning the all-important question of immigration: There is an evident need to put in place a new migration policy, based on respect for human rights and solidarity, across Europe.

As the Vice-President responsible for the budget, I want to build on the existing constructive cooperation we already have with the Budgetary Authority – the Council and the European Parliament.

I see it as my main task to ensure that the Committee's Budget Group provides the Committee bureau with an input that consistently enables the bureau to make the most informed decisions on budgetary matters. It is my impression that the Committee manages its budget in a correct and transparent manner and this is obviously how it should be, now and in the future.



Pavel TRANTINA (CZ)

President of the SOC Section

It is an honour to get the support of Group III to lead the SOC Section and to build on the great work done by Mrs Maureen O'Neill in the previous mandate. In line with what she was doing and what we have discussed, I am convinced that we should continue improving the following areas:

- Strategy building within our Committee, where Sections should have a better say
- Better cooperation between the sections – on a personal basis of the Presidents, but also through joint events, which would enable overcoming group lines
- Enabling the best possible representation of the EESC by the Section members in various events
- Encouraging better going local participation of our members
- Strengthening our external communication and building relationships with the EU institutions and all civil society organisations to promote our work and to ensure that we undertake our work from the most informed position.

I find the role of President very divers – he/she should be not only a chair of the meetings, but also a facilitator of debates and helper with opinions to be produced, an envoy of the Section in the Bureau and its representative for other EU institutions and organisations. Therefore, here are the principles I would like to follow:

- Stressing the active involvement of the civil society – putting civil dialogue next to the social one
- Adding social economy approach next to the market one
- Promotion of European values – with a special emphasis on human rights
- Ensuring the gender balance
- Striving to reach the "dynamic compromise" between the groups and members, as we are supposed to (and which we have been lacking more and more in the past years).

Since my "pre-election" last spring, I have benefitted from the kind help of Maureen and the secretariat. We worked well together to ensure a smooth transition. And we started to work on the Section priorities. Of course, they will be further debated with the Section Bureau and members, but already now it is clear that there will be three main areas of the SOC Section work:

- Migration, asylum and integration
- Respect for fundamental and social rights
- Investment, including social investment, in inclusive growth, jobs and human capital

I fully support these priorities and am I am looking forward to cooperating with you on the SOC Section development and work. It is a privilege to serve as the SOC President



Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)

President of the REX Section

In the new mandate more than ever before we must re-establish the role the EESC should play in the EU external policy. We shall show strong Group III leadership of REX. Today there are new challenges in front of the EU, especially at our borders. That's we need more focus on external relations in the EESC. We need a new impetus and, we need the energy of all the new members.

What we should work on together in REX?

The REX policy mix is wide, ranging from EU Neighbours to Transatlantic Relations, ACP, Latin America, Asia. The EESC should work to help the EU institutions to support stability, promote human rights, gender equality and democracy, spread prosperity, the enforcement of the rule of law and good governance.

Today the EU Neighbourhood Policy is of primary importance for our Union. There have been challenging political developments in those countries. As a result today the neighbourhood is less stable and very fragile. That is why I believe the REX Section should lead very clear, coherent, competent policy in frame of the EU political decisions. And we should support the efforts for peaceful solution of the conflicts.

We should also not forget at our Southern borders

and that the number of migrants reaching Europe has risen dramatically this year. The flow of desperate migrants from Syria and North Africa hoping to reach Europe is already much higher than in the same period in 2014. For years the EU has been struggling to harmonize asylum policy. That is difficult with 28 member states, each with their own police force and judiciary. More detailed joint rules have been brought in with the Common European Asylum System - but rules are one thing, putting them into practice EU-wide is another challenge. As civil society representatives we should work also on this issue and it should be our priority.

I would also like to stress on the importance of trade issues. We need to secure the role of the EESC in the monitoring process of the trade agreements. One thing should be clear: the interests of the EU citizens should be protected!

I would like to develop the cross section initiatives especially in the field of sustainable development, climate change, SDGs, green economy. My experience in the NAT Section will help me.

I'll strongly rely on all of you, on your knowledge, experience and support. Working together as a team is the core of all successful achievements.

And then, not least of all, we have 13 Group III members who will occupy key posts on various important EESC Bodies:



Ionuț SIBIAN (RO)
President of the REX EU-SERBIA
Joint Consultative Committee



**Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ
BATALLER (ES)**
Appointed as Quaestor



Etele BARÁTH (HU)
President of the EUROPE 2020
Steering Group



Graham WATSON (UK)
President of the REX
EU-CHINA Contact Group



Yves SOMVILLE (BE)
President of the REX EU-ACP
Follow-up Committee



Krzysztof PATER (PL)
President of the REX EU-JAPAN
Follow-up Committee



**Løvbjerg ABILGAARD
Ask (DK)**
President of the IT-MEMBERS Group



Lidija PAVIĆ-ROGOŠIĆ (HR)
President of the REX EU-CHILE
Joint Consultative Committee



Benedicte FEDERSPIEL (DK)
President of the REX International
Trade Follow-up Committee



Ákos TOPOLÁNSZKY (HU)
President of the SOC Project
on Integration of the
Roma Community



Carlos TRIÁS PINTO (ES)
President of the ECO Permanent
Study Group on Economic Policy
Co-ordination (GOPE)



Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO)
President of the SOC Permanent
Study Group on Immigration
and Integration



Antonio LONGO (IT)
President of the TEN Permanent Study
Group on the Digital Agenda

