



Civil society participation and Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty: time for a breakthrough

Editorial



Luca Jahier (IT)

President of the "Various Interests" Group

At the plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in November, the EESC adopted an own-initiative Opinion on the implementation of Article 11, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Lisbon Treaty, of which I was the rapporteur. In a poignant reminder of why we need more civil society participation, the adoption of the Opinion took place on the same day as the concerted strikes against austerity in which millions of European workers participated throughout the EU. The events of 14 November were indeed a very timely reminder of why we need more effective participatory democracy: in order to restore the credibility and trust of citizens in national and European legislators, in the European project, in the very foundations of democracy. For we are dangerously approaching the precipice of political extremism, of alienation and disavowal by citizens towards their elected representative leaders and the entire political system. The sense of frustration by citizens is overwhelming and we need to provide a structured platform for the European institutions to listen and to better take into account the views of civil society and citizens. In my opinion, both Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty and the EESC should have a key role to play in this process.

The necessity to involve civil society and citizens is largely shared by the European institutions – one must only read the inspiring State of Union speech of President Barosso to the European Parliament in September 2012, to share the sense of urgency in reinforcing democratic accountability. As was stated by Mr Barosso, "We need to guarantee effective democratic oversight and reassure citizens that this project is their project – not just a project of the political and economic elites." This view was reiterated by

the Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr Šefčovič, who speaking at the EESC Bureau in November, recognised that the Treaty of Lisbon provides the EESC with a key intermediary role between the European institutions and civil society. Where everyone is in agreement, is that we need greater transparency, participation and ultimately ownership by citizens and civil society, if we are to make the leap of faith beyond the national realm and towards a truly 'European' Europe for 'European' citizens.

It is my firm belief that the Lisbon Treaty provides the key to this process. Firstly, by strengthening the role of national and European Parliaments, in Articles 10 and 12 respectively. Secondly, by rendering consultation and dialogue with citizens and civil society a legal requirement and by allowing citizens the possibility to ask the European Commission to initiate policies on specific topics (European Citizens Initiative). In the case of the latter, procedures have been established and operational. The question today is how to implement Article 11, paragraphs 1 and 2, in order to bring Europe closer to its citizens, not only in Brussels, but also at the national and local level.

Already since 2010, the EESC has asked the European Commission to adopt a Green Paper on the implementation of Article 11 paragraphs 1 and 2, but this request has remained unanswered. In the EESC Opinion, this request is reiterated, but a pragmatic approach is also espoused. Hence, although it is for each EU Institution to develop its own instruments for dialogue and consultation, it is my opinion that an overall coordinated and coherent strategy for all Institutions would be the most effective way forward. For we must not forget

that European citizens often view the EU as a single entity, they do not necessarily distinguish between the different structures.

With this in mind, the proposals made in my Opinion are threefold: firstly, it is imperative to assess the extent of civil society consultations and dialogue since the EC White Paper on Governance in 2001. Such a quantitative and qualitative assessment would help to identify best practices, obstacles and would provide a much clearer understanding for all stakeholders of what has already been achieved and what should be improved. For a great deal has been achieved, be it of varying quality, in consultative mechanisms and civil society dialogue on the EU's trade policy and development cooperation with third parties, in the EU Integration Forum, by several Directorate Generals of the EC, the Citizens' Agora of the European Parliament and the Open Days of the Committee of the Regions, to name but a few examples.

The second concrete proposal made in the Opinion is to establish a database between all EU Institutions and which would be accessible to citizens. Such a database could include details on organisations involved in previous consultations and dialogue, with a view to preparing an annual European report. Clearly, such a report could become an instrument of accountability, but also a tool for disseminating information on best practices. It could also directly contribute to assessing the effectiveness of the current system of structured cooperation and recommend a general framework for how EU institutions and bodies could implement Article 11, paragraphs 1 and 2.

Thirdly, in view of the forthcoming European Year of Citizens and the elections to the

European Parliament, the Opinion makes proposals for the organisation of a large scale conference of national parliaments and of the European Parliament, which could adopt recommendations for renewal in Europe. In parallel, the European Economic and Social Committee could organise a similar event for civil society and working together we could forge the bridge between our citizens, the electorate and the elected. Thus, we could jointly work towards a structured debate on our future, restoring both representative and participatory democracy, stimulating governments and European institutions to move Europe forward, which includes preparing the 2014 elections to the European Parliament.

It is clear to all of us that the European Union has changed a great deal in the last few years and we are currently faced with the greatest challenge to the very existence and to the legitimacy of the European project. It is my view that Article 11 is a highly relevant and practical tool that is available to all of us, and which could help to appease some of the frustration of citizens. It should be an instrument for active engagement by citizens and the European Institutions and a tool to strengthen the European project.

As Jean Monnet wrote several decades ago "Nothing can be done without citizens but nothing can last without institutions". It is now time for all to work together for the future of Europe!

To read the relevant EESC press release (69/2012), please go to: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.press-releases.25175>

Interview



Jean-Marc ROIRANT

Co-President of the Liaison Group at the EESC

President of the European Civic Forum

Co-ordinator of the European Year on Citizenship Alliance

European Citizenship is more than rights!

On 11 August 2011, the European Commission proposed to designate 2013 as the "European Year of Citizens" to mark the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the European Union Citizenship under the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. European civil society organisations and networks members of the EESC Liaison Group have created a European Year of Citizens 2013 Alliance aiming at advocating MEPs for a broader understanding of European citizenship within the proposal to designate 2013 the European year of Citizens. The Alliance benefits from the support of the European Economic and Social Committee and is aiming, in the long run, to mobilise and coordinate wider civil society engagement in the activities which will be scheduled during the European Year of Citizens 2013, to initiate a European-wide debate on issues relating

to the exercise of European citizens' rights and to citizens' participation in the democratic life of the EU.

EUROPE III: The EESC has criticized the main focus of the European Commission for the European Year of Citizens (EYC), as it does not share the point of view, that mobility related issues are the most urgent for the citizens of the EU at this moment. Which priorities do you and do the Members of the EYC Alliance see as the priorities?

The priorities of the Alliance for the European Year of Citizens (EYCA) can be summarized by the three working groups which stem from the political Manifesto which all the Alliance members agreed upon. Our priorities thus range from

participatory citizenship and civil dialogue (1); articulation between social, political and economic citizenship (2) and inclusiveness citizenship for all the EU residents (3).

EUROPE III: The EYC Alliance has united an impressive amount of CSO networks: what was the role of the EESC Liaison Group in this process and what might be the lessons learned for the coming years?

The EYCA initiative started in the Liaison Group and was made possible by the fact that the Liaison Group enabled various networks to meet on a regular basis and to work together. This initiative clearly shows the determining and structuring role of the EESC as "Civil Society House".

EUROPE III: The EESC and its Coordination Group as the leading and coordinating organ has envisaged wide cooperation with the EYC Alliance and the EU-wide civil society. To get ideas on board, a Wide Open Space event is foreseen for the beginning of January, where EYC Alliance and other partners might play a key role in finalising and contributing to a joint programme. Which activities or elements do you see as the most interesting and important for the next year?

Two aspects will be fundamental for the EYCA action throughout the European Year:

- We firstly want this Year to be the opportunity for citizens, civil society activists, decision-makers, etc. to discuss and debate on the various aspects of citizenship. Whether it is at the European or at the national level, our action will be aimed at providing spaces for discussions and reflections. Although we aim at gathering policy recommendations by the end of the Year, for us, it is almost as important as providing European citizens with the space to express their

views because we are convinced that it is the very first step to become an active and concerned citizen.

- We then intend to use the opportunity offered by this European Year to strengthen civil dialogue, at the local, national and European levels and to reinforce the role played by Civil Society organisations in the decision-making processes in all EU-28 Member States (Croatia will become an official member of the EU in July 2013).

EUROPE III: Where do you see as being the best opportunities of cooperation between EU, national and regional/local level organisations?

Cooperation between EU, national and regional/local level organisations will be the key of the EYCA success. We thus intend to set up functioning methods that include all levels of action (eg gathering National Coalitions' coordinators and direct members of the EYCA in the Plenary meetings) while involving representatives from these different level of actions in all European-wide events we organise, and more importantly in the three thematic Working groups. Cross-

border cooperation will also be encouraged between the National Coalitions.

EUROPE III: What would be your main success indicators, achievements or results for the year?

The main achievements we expect are policy recommendations to be delivered by the Alliance by the end of 2013 and the success of the work of the thematic Working Groups is crucial in the success of the EYCA as a whole. Another principal indicator of our success will be the number of activities and people involved in the events organised at both the European and the national levels.

To find out more about the EYCA, please visit:
<http://ey2013-alliance.eu/index.html>



Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING AND CLIMATE CHANGE MIGRATION UNDER THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

On 12 November 2012, Group III member Carlos Pereira Martins (PT) attended the Atlantic Forum, at the Euskalduna Palace Conference Center in Bilbao. The opening session had the contributions and speeches of Mr Guillermo Echenique, External Action minister of the Basque government, Mrs Segolaine Royal, President of Pïotou-Charantes Regional Council in France, Mr Andres Trastoy, Director General of Fisheries and Resources of the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Mr Izvbaskun, Bilbao, Member of the Eropcean Parliament, Mr Miguel Pariza, EESC Member and Mr Matthew King, General director for maritime Affaires and fisheries of the European Commission.



The main speeches touched the Maritime spatial Planning and Climate Change Migration under the Ecosystem Approach. First of all, the ecosystem approach in fisheries management, something very crucial for this part of the Iberian peninsula, mainly for Portuguese and Spanish fishermen and industries. The ecosystem approach lies at the heart of the EU's Marine Strategy framework directive, the objective being to achieve a good environmental status, in each sea basin. The conference had a review of the basis for applying the ecosystem approach and the experience acquired so far, in order to identify needs and actions for its implementation in European Atlantic waters, with a particular emphasis on fisheries. During this Conference a very important subject was offshore aquaculture, as well, as an opportunity and a strong technological challenge in a perspective of upgrading from the current status to a possible future of the European aquaculture sector. The technological needs and the state of the arts were discussed by the industry representatives and all stakeholders from Atlantic Member States. One thing that was identified was that there is a lot potential at local, national and regional levels to increase projects in the aquaculture sector and that these need to be identified.

Another main subject was the socio-economic impact of Renewal Energies in the industrial development. The so-called socio-economic impact, clustering and indicators were reviewed with the experience of different Member States in setting up an industrial sector around marine renewable energy. The question now is how to accelerate the development of this sector to make it a significant player in electric generation, job creation and economic growth, next generations?

Intermodal transport services and maritime safety was another important point addressed at the forum. Services at ports, supply connections, pollution prevention, improving prevention and response to accidental maritime pollution, cooperation between public administrations and the private sector, maritime surveillance as a pillar for maritime safety and environmental protection and, mostly, the Member States experience dealing with those matters, was a very topical discussion.

LAUNCH OF STUDY FINDINGS: "ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS' AUSTERITY PLANS ON THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES"



Miguel Ángel CABRA DE LUNA (ES)
Spokesperson for the Social Economy Category
Member of the Bureau of the Various Interests Group



Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL)
President of the European Disability Forum
Chairman of the International Disability Alliance (IDA)
<http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/en>

On 6 November 2012, Group III members, Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna, Spokesperson for the Social Economy Category of the EESC, and Yannis Vardakastanis spoke at an event in the European Parliament to present a study on the impact of the austerity measures on the rights of people with disabilities. The study, commissioned by the European Foundation Centre and its Consortium on Human Rights and Disability, provides an exhaustive overview of how the crisis is dramatically affecting the lives of people with disabilities, which represent 15% of the European population. Rosa Estarás MEP, who hosted the event, and the representatives of the European Commission and the Council (Jose Leandro, economic advisor of President Van Rompuy) welcomed the findings and highlighted the importance of this type of studies for EU policy-making.

The executive summary of the study can be found on: http://www.efc.be/programmes_services/resources/Documents/Austerity2012.PDF

To read more, please go to: http://www.efc.be/programmes_services/resources/Documents/Austerity2012.PDF



ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION FOR ALL IN THE LABOUR MARKET

From the left at the opening session: Commissioner Andor, Krzysztof Pater and Ioannis Vardakastanis

On 6 November 2012, the Labour Market Observatory (LMO) of the EESC hosted a major conference on: 'The Labour Market: participation of people with intellectual impairment or relational problems'. The opening session was chaired by Group III member Krzysztof Pater (PL), President of the LMO and Lazlo Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, gave the keynote speech. Group III member Ioannis Vardakastanis (EL), President of the European Disability Forum also addressed the assembly. Luca Jahier (IT), President of the Various Interests' Group was the moderator of the first thematic session entitled: "What is the situation now?"

To find out more about this event, consult the programme and view the presentations, please go to: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-excluded-or-included>

News from Group III

Group III extends a warm welcome to a new member from the UK, **Richard BALFE**, who replaces our dear friend and colleague, Sukhdev Sharma, who sadly passed away suddenly in 2011. Richard is no stranger to Brussels: he was a UK Member of the European Parliament from 1979-2004 and is currently Chairman of the European Parliament Members Pension Fund. He also wears many other different hats and, as such, he is one of the two specialised external Directors on the Geneva based CERN Pension Fund Governing Board. Serving as an elected member on the committee of the European Parliament Former Members' Association, he represents them on the Executive of the Global Democracy Initiative (GDI) and is currently Vice Chair of that body. In 2004 and 2007 he was an election monitor in the Ukraine.



Richard lectures regularly at University level on the European Institutions and, during his terms as an MEP, he took a particular interest in Foreign Affairs and in Turkey's application for EU Membership. He possesses a detailed knowledge of Turkey, of its political life and its history, which he built up over twenty years of membership of the EP-Turkey joint Parliamentary Committee, where he made dozens of visits covering virtually every major city in Turkey. In addition he served for ten years as one of the Members of the five strong House Administration Committee (The College of Quaestors) of the European Parliament and as a member of Parliament's ruling Bureau.

Welcome, Richard, to our Various Interests Group and we look forward to working closely with you and to tapping into your very interesting experience and widespread expertise!

The Bureau of the Various Interests Group organised a conference in Nicosia, Cyprus on 30 November 2012. The main objective of the conference was to explore how the tourism sector can contribute to Europe's competitiveness and innovation, to its sustainable development and to employment creation. Notably in the current period of socio-economic crises, it is necessary to capitalise on Europe's natural and cultural diversity and to use the sector as a means to achieving the Europe 2020 Strategy and to re-launching the internal market. For it is estimated that

the European tourism industry generates 10% of Europe's GDP and provides employment to 12% of the population. But in order for the sector to be able to overcome the crises and to develop competitively and sustainably, it is necessary to encourage cooperation among EU Member States as stipulated in the Lisbon Treaty (TFEU Article 195) and among all key stakeholders. Similarly, it is essential to develop an integrated approach and to adapt the sector through innovation, improved quality, skills and diversity of services. Ultimately, it is only through an effective tourism policy which emphasises sustainability, responsibility and high quality that Europe will be able to capitalise on this crucial sector.

Following some words of welcome from the President of the Various Interests Group, Luca Jahier and our host, Nikos Moiseos, Secretary General of the Cyprus Workers' Confederation (SEK), the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment of Cyprus, Egly Pantelakis, representing the Cyprus Presidency, gave an overall view of the situation regarding tourism and employment on the island. In the afternoon session, Skevi Koukouma, General Secretary of the Pancyprian Federation of Women's Organisations (POGO) and member of the Cyprus Parliament, spoke to the topic of: 'From agri-tourism to cultural tourism: promoting regional development and inclusion through

Europe's heritage'. A cross-section of representatives of organised civil society organisations in Cyprus took part in the rich debates, citing examples for their experiences and they contributed very positively to the success of the event.

To find out more about this conference, consult the programme and view the speeches and presentations, please go to:
<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-tourism-and-competitiveness>



Highlights of the November 2012 EESC Plenary Session

Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Mr Luca JAHIER (IT) is the Co-Rapporteur for the Sub-committee opinion on: "Statute/funding of European political parties and European political foundations" – SC/36.

Mr Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Radio equipment market/making available - harmonisation of the laws of the Member States" – INT/670.

Mr Krzysztof BALON (PL) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Fund for European aid to the most deprived" – SOC/473.

Mr Pavel TRANTINA (CZ) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Youth Package" – SOC/474.

Mr Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "A Stronger European Industry for Growth and Economic Recovery: Industrial Policy Communication Update" – CCMI/108.

Mr Juraj STERN (SK) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "CARS 2020 - An Action Plan for a competitive and sustainable automotive industry in Europe" – CCMI/109.

Ms Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "Fluorinated greenhouse gases" – NAT/589.

Mr Pedro NARRO (ES) is the Co-Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Green economy - advancing sustainable development for Europe" – NAT/590.

Mr Carlos Alberto PEREIRA MARTINS (PT) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "The EU's External Aviation Policy - Addressing Future Challenges" – TEN/500.

Mr Lutz RIBBE (DE) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Quality of petrol and diesel fuels/promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources" – TEN/502.

Mr Richard ADAMS (UK) is the Rapporteur for the exploratory opinion on: "Exploring the needs and methods of public involvement and engagement in the energy policy field" – TEN/503.

Mrs Benedicte FEDERSPIEL (DA) is the Co-Rapporteur for the opinion on: "The Single Market Act - identifying missing measures" – INT/655.

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>



Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 14-15 November 2012 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.



Luca JAHIER (IT) – SOC/423 "Principles, procedures and actions for the implementation of Articles 11(1) and 11(2) of the Lisbon Treaty" (EESC opinion 766/2012)

This opinion aims to develop concrete proposals for action in order to urge the Commission to define appropriate measures to implement of paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 11 of the Treaty, to strengthen cooperation in this field with the European Parliament, to begin concrete cooperation with the Council and to build a new covenant of wider and permanent CSO representatives at European level. It calls for the establishment of a wider and clearer framework for good practices of structured civil dialogue which have been developed either in the EESC, in the various European institutions, or at the national level and proposes the method for such a study as well as highlighting a few examples of good practice for a study which, in the medium term, will be entrusted to an external body.

For a more detailed and in-depth analysis of this opinion, please read the editorial on page 1.



Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES) – INT/629 "Involvement of consumer associations in the establishment and functioning of the single market" (EESC opinion 1171/2012)

In this own-initiative opinion, the EESC calls on the Commission to take the initiative to provide consumer organisations with certain common minimum requirements and with the rights they ought to have (e.g. right to be consulted, right to be heard). The Committee considers that the Commission should encourage Member States and national regulators to promote transparency, information and decision-making, stimulating discussion of the interests at stake and supporting positive discrimination in favour of organisations that represent the interests of consumers so that they can participate on an equal basis with economic players in regulators' discussion forums and consultative bodies. Consumers usually find it more difficult to compare services than to compare products. The task is particularly complicated in relation to services of general economic interest. Not only are the contractual terms of these services very varied, but the inclusion of elements besides the service itself needs to be adequately explained by the regulatory bodies, discussed with organisations that represent the interests of consumers, and understood by consumers. There is also a huge disparity in access to information and expert knowledge on the operation of markets for services of general economic interest. The EESC suggests setting up a system similar to the RAPEX system for defective products for sub-standard services, to allow consumer associations, through their networks, to warn consumers about such services.



Viliam PÁLENÍK (SK) – ECO/331 "Common system of value added tax, as regards the treatment of vouchers" (EESC opinion 1401/2012)

The EESC welcomes the endeavour to define the various forms of vouchers as precisely as possible and to do away with excessive administrative burdens in the distribution of multi-purpose vouchers. The aim here is to prevent attempts at tax avoidance when vouchers are used. At the same time, the rules will ensure that issuers of vouchers will not be at a disadvantage compared with their competitors. It is essential that Member States abide by common rules and remove various exemptions that distort competition and dilute the competitive environment. The EESC would like to draw attention to a number of issues that need to be resolved before the directive comes into force. These mainly involve possible problems with different tax exemption limits in individual Member States when vouchers are given for free, the lack of transitional provisions and the absence of rules to cover the non-redemption of single-purpose vouchers.

Viliam PÁLENÍK (SK) – ECO/337 "Common system of value added tax as regards a quick reaction mechanism against VAT fraud" (EESC opinion 2139/2012)

The EESC supports the aim of the proposal – namely to make the fight against tax fraud more effective and is pleased that the proposal for a directive enables Member States to react flexibly to fraud in a particular sector and almost immediately introduce measures to prevent potential loss of tax revenue. On the other hand, the EESC points in this opinion to a number of shortcomings in the proposal and sets out observations and alternative proposals that could help to improve the status quo in the future. The EESC notes that measures intended to simplify the procedure for collecting VAT may not, except to a negligible extent, affect the overall amount of the tax revenue of the Member State collected at the stage of final consumption. Moreover, it notes that people with professional expertise, particularly from practice, should be at the heart of the group involved in future proposals for measures that would be

subject to the procedure set out in the proposed new articles of the directive. In conclusion, the EESC also thinks, that Member States must have the opportunity, if necessary, to have a draft application for derogation discussed in advance in the advisory committee and so forestall possible proceedings before the European Court of Justice.



Maureen O'NEILL (UK) – SOC/448 "The involvement and participation of older people in society" (EESC opinion 1526/2012)

In its joint message to decision-makers at the different levels, but also to stakeholders and other involved parties, the EESC makes ten specific recommendations, amongst which are that the focus be put on the capacity and contribution of older people and not on their chronological age, and that governments, NGOs and the media highlight these elements in positive statements. Support should be given for the active participation of all age groups in society and to greater solidarity and cooperation between and within generations. All stakeholders should continue to develop an approach that emphasises life-long learning for individual older people, employers and communities and governments must ensure the digital inclusion and training of older people. Moreover, it should be made possible for older workers to stay in employment until the statutory retirement age and beyond, if they so wish and employers should adapt the working environment and find contractual arrangements to meet the needs of older workers. In conclusion, older people should be recognised as consumers and, consequently, businesses should be encouraged to produce goods and services that respond to the needs of an ageing society.



Ákos TOPOLÁNSZKY (HU) – SOC/447 "Societal empowerment and integration of Roma citizens in Europe" (EESC opinion 1566/2012)

The EESC welcomes and is encouraged by the recent steps taken by the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council, other EU bodies, and the Member States to achieve inclusion and integration of the European Roma. The findings of the study commissioned by the EESC and carried out in 27 Member States show that apart from a lack of information and general dissatisfaction, there is also widespread frustration and distrust among spokespersons for the Roma community, civil society organisations and their representatives. It seems that the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) have not met the growing expectations of the Roma or their sincere hope that the strategies could really help improve social integration. The instruments and resources available for implementation of the NRISs appear insufficient to compensate for the continuing negative impact of discrimination and exclusion. The Committee feels that a rights-based approach to planning and implementation of NRISs is needed to ensure human and fundamental rights and that combating discrimination should be a priority in all areas of public life. The EESC is in favour of the European Commission's planned network of national Roma contact points, if it is endowed with the requisite powers, and emphasises that organised civil society, including Roma organisations and lobbies, must be fully involved throughout the development of NRISs (planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). NRIS monitoring and evaluation must be stepped up on a sound, scientific basis, with the involvement of independent observers. At the same time, systems must be put in place to ensure financing for this process.



Reine-Claude MADER (FR) – INT/629 "A European Consumer Agenda: boosting confidence and growth" (EESC opinion 1765/2012)

The EESC supports the agenda's set objectives but has concerns about its coordination with the "Consumer Programme" and the adequacy of the funding allocated to it, which appears to fall distinctly short of the stated intention. The Committee attaches particular importance to vulnerable categories and is, therefore, in favour of the agenda's proposed initiatives concerning financial inclusion and access to essential services. Moreover, it stresses the importance of all measures concerning sustainable development (energy management, eco-design, ethical and ecological norms in production and distribution of goods) and believes that improving food safety is essential to ensuring product safety from the farm or the factory to the front door and will allow healthy and fair competition. In conclusion, the EESC reiterates the need to ensure the independence of alternative dispute resolution systems vis-à-vis the litigants. As already emphasised in various opinions, the Committee is in favour of introducing collective redress.



Carlos TRIAS PINTO (ES) – ECO/339 "Banking Union Package" (EESC opinion 2048/2012)

Since the onset of the banking crisis, the EESC has advocated greater integration and harmonisation of the regulatory system governing European banks. In light of the current negotiations on the Banking Union and

the planned regulation to set up a European Supervisory Authority, the EESC supports the Commission's initiative, as set out in this opinion and also emphasises the need to adopt a practical roadmap that can start having effect as quickly as possible. More specifically, the EESC urges rapid agreement on the entry into force of the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM). This means starting with unification as early as 2013 without at this point setting uncertain goals, as the basic initial objective is to save the Euro while minimising the costs for tax payers of possible restructuring measures or closures, by ensuring that sufficient funds are in place in advance and that the costs are borne by shareholders and creditors. Moreover, it supports the ECB taking on responsibility for supervising all banks in the banking union, however small, especially the consolidated accounts of cross-border transactions, and for applying the single rulebook to them. The EESC considers close connections between the European Banking Authority (EBA) and the ECB to be crucial, realising that some overlap of functions will occur during the initial phase. In conclusion, the Committee considers that the Commission should draw up a green or white paper on how to finance the banking union in a harmonised manner so it will be in a position to decide on the taxes or levies on financial and banking transactions. A banking union would represent a step towards the Euro zone and the EU as a whole embarking on a virtuous cycle overcoming its design flaws and enabling the single market to regain competitiveness.

To read the relevant EESC press release (70/2012), please go to: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.press-releases.25215>



Ionuț SIBIAN (RO) – REX/373 "Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) and for establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)" (EESC opinion 2069/2012)

The draft opinion welcomes the two proposals and issues a set of specific recommendations on both of them. Some of the main ones on the IPA II are that the EESC has reservations as regards the proposal to use a sector-based approach for EU financial assistance and feels that this approach should be used only when partner countries have clear rules and procedures in place. Moreover, the Committee asks the European Commission to set-up appropriate platforms in order to involve civil society organisations in all stages of the assistance: preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. On the ENI, the EESC recommends the setting-up of platforms for dialogue between civil society and the governments in the EU neighbouring countries, and stands ready to assist the European Commission and the European External Action Service in achieving this objective. In conclusion the Committee recommends that the EU pay more attention to the capacity building of institutions in the partner countries in charge with the implementation of the assistance, in order to assure a good absorption capacity and transparency in the use of the funds.

Quote of the month...



"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome."

Anne Bradstreet (1612 - 1672)
From: 'Meditations Divine and Moral'
written in 1655
The first female poet and writer in the
British North American colonies to be
published

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Bradstreet

OUR GROUP'S STRENGTH



At the extraordinary meeting of the Bureau of Group III, to be held on 17 December 2012, the spokespersons of the four Categories will present an overview of the main conclusions and results of their various meetings held during 2012 and outline their visions, expectations and planned draft work programmes for 2013.

To find out more about the categories and their members, please go to: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3>

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>