



European Economic and Social Committee



Europe III

The voice of Group III
Various Interests
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Intermediary Europe at the Heart of the EU2020 Strategy: Bringing Europe closer to citizens Luxembourg 2 December 2015

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Editorial



Luca JAHIER (IT)
President of the Various Interests Group

"It is cross-border Europe which can bring real progress". "Bringing Europe closer to its citizens is becoming more and more difficult, but also indispensable".

With these comments by Mr René Collin, Minister of the Walloon Government and Mr Marco Wagener, Vice-President of the ESC of Luxembourg respectively, the Various Interests Group of the EESC launched the discussion on the contribution of macro-regional cooperation to the achievement of the objectives of the EU2020 Strategy. The topic is directly linked to previous work by the Committee and for this reason we invited Mr Etele Baráth, President of the Europe 2020 Steering Committee of the EESC, to give the keynote speech.

The Extraordinary Meeting of the Group took place on 2 December in Luxembourg within the context of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU and brought together approximately 100 participants. Concentrating on the example of the Greater Region, which ensures cooperation between six regions in four Member States (Belgium, Luxembourg, France and Germany), the participants had the opportunity to learn and exchange experiences on the very

ambitious, successful and long-term cooperation of the Greater Region. Over the last twenty years, a multitude of networks have been established, which have been tightly knit together, making a real difference to the everyday lives of citizens. As we learnt, the Greater Region brings together some 12 million Europeans, which constitutes more than the population of 17 EU Member States. Moreover, some 200,000 individuals cross the regional borders for employment purposes on a daily basis. Indeed, there are labour, industrial, trade, environmental, educational, research, training, cultural, sporting and touristic networks throughout the regions. As we heard, there is an inter-regional parliament, an inter-regional Economic and Social Council and a bi-annual Summit of the Greater Region, currently presided by Wallonia.

In short, the conference enabled us to learn first-hand about intermediary Europe: a complementary model of governance involving economic, social and civil partners, successfully cooperating at the macro-regional level. Arguably, this is a type of governance which to date has not been sufficiently engaged in European policy-making. However, by its very essence, macro-

regional cooperation represents the values of partnership, proportionality and subsidiarity subscribed within the European Treaties. As we heard from our accomplished speakers, it is precisely this 'intermediary Europe' which has a pivotal role to play in promoting the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Hence, the choice of titles for our three panels of our conference: a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe.

My personal reaction to the day's proceedings was very positive. Having only vaguely heard of the Greater Region in the past, I was very impressed to learn the details of this concrete project of macro-regional cooperation. Not only has the project already brought about numerous very positive results, but by its self-feeding energy and its ambition it will undoubtedly go even further than originally planned. Indeed, this is one of its strengths: it has managed to build on a few key European funding programmes and to grow exponentially, taking on a life of its own. One might even say that today we can witness the living proof of a small Single Market, a mini Schengen, only one that works! I also have to admit that I found it very refreshing, among all the general

negativism that is currently surrounding Europe and the EU, to witness first-hand this creative collaboration between entrepreneurship, local authorities, economic, social and civic actors. It is a prime example of how cooperation, both institutional, but also among socio-professional organisations and citizens, is the key to leveraging our value added and sustainable growth.

Before ending this Editorial, I would like to say a few words about the inspiring field visit that we carried out to the town of Esch-sur-Alzette and specifically to the reconverted industrial site of Belval. In what will without doubt become a significant centre of scientific research in Europe in the future, we saw the living proof of our European capacity for innovation and architectural prowess, mixing the past with the present and future. Europe's historical development has certainly not been linear, but we certainly know how to build our future on our common European past. Once again, I am proud to be European!

Webpage of the conference:
<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-eu2020-closer-to-citizen>



SPECIAL FEATURE: What do we expect from the COP21 Conference in Paris?



Lutz RIBBE (DE)
Member of the Various Interests' Group
Vice-President of the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO)



In 1992, the UNFCCC was adopted at the legendary "Rio Conference". The main goal is described in Article 2, namely: "the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to reach a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system". Since then there have been 20 more or less fruitless COP's (Conference of Parties), COP 21 is now scheduled for the first two weeks of December in Paris.

Apparently, the political leaders have, however, already waved goodbye to the original goals. Since 1992, global emissions have increased by 50% (!). Everywhere on the planet the first serious effects of climate change appear, although the

temperature increase is still less than 1 degree. Now the objective in Paris is to adopt policies that do not allow an increase by more than 2 degrees Celsius. Those who do so, they accept knowingly these "dangerous interferences in the climate" that need to be avoided!

The EESC has sent a strong message to the Commission, Council and Parliament regarding the COP 21st. We have supported the EU's negotiating position and look forward to an ambitious, legally binding and fair agreement for all. We would also point out some things that are not on the agenda in Paris, but they are essential if one wants to protect the future generations from worse. The first is: yes, we are in favour of the creation of a global climate protection fund of \$ 100bn per year in Paris. But: Can you thus fight against the \$ 5.3 trillion that flow according the International Monetary Fund annually as subsidies

to dirty energy? Yes, a staggering \$ 5.3 trillion! These are daily \$ 15 billion, an incredible sum. The policymakers have to get serious about its promise to abolish environmentally harmful subsidies. But this is missing.

A second concern we want to raise: not optimistic negotiation results will protect our climate, but only its consistent implementation. And therefore the policymakers need us, the actors and representatives of civil society. But it is precisely this vital role of civil society that will not be discussed in Paris.

The EESC conducted a highly respected European study on the role of civil society in the redesign of the energy policy developed under the auspices of members of our Group III. We note that what is known as "energy transition", is not really revolutionary technological innovation, the

turning away from coal and nuclear power and the move to solar, wind and biomass. Much more revolutionary is the new power structure, which was developed. In thousands of smaller, decentralized plants individuals, farmers, cooperatives, small businesses produce completely new "player", clean energy. The large energy giants have overstepped development. But it is precisely this integration and participation of civil society that creates the necessary tolerance. Unfortunately, we must recognise that these opportunities for our active participation are systematically ignored in almost all Member States. And that is scandalous.

The COP 21 in Paris will therefore be not the final destination but only a milestone on a long journey, which can only be successful if civil society is actively involved. And that is why we must fight harder to achieve this goal.

Highlights of the October 2015 EESC Plenary Session

Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Digital contract rights" – INT/775.

Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "Review of the Directive 2003/71/EC on the prospects to be published when securities are offered to the public or admitted to trading and amending Directive 2001/34/EC" – ECO/388.

Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (ES) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "Review of the 6-pack and the 2-pack" – ECO/391.

Antonio LONGO (IT) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "European Deposit Re-Insurance Scheme" – ECO/393.



Cillian LOHAN (IE) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Circular Economy Package" – NAT/676.

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>

Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role



Roman HAKEN (CZ)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

"SMART POLICIES FOR SMART ISLANDS" MALINSKA ISLAND OF KRK, CROATIA 6 NOVEMBER 2015

In March 2015, the EESC adopted an own-initiative opinion on "Smart islands" (Rapporteur: Ms Darmanin). The European Economic and Social Committee had decided to launch a project on the topic of the opinion. It kicked off with a conference on: "Smart policies for smart islands", which was co-organised by the EESC, Rijeka County Chamber of the Croatian Chamber of Economy, INSULEUR network, with the support of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) Islands Commission and the European Small Islands Federation. The event took place on Friday 6 November 2015, in Malinska (Island of Krk, Croatia).

The main focus of the conference was that islands have unique characteristics which, in turn, pose specific problems and difficulties: but, these issues can often be transformed into opportunities if smart and sustainable development policies are implemented. The conference aimed to bring together policy makers and key stakeholders involved in developing and implementing smart island policies, providing them with a space to discuss projects and exchange good practices. The keynote speeches were given by Vidoje Vujić, President of the County Chamber of Rijeka and George Benetos, President of Insuleur. The opening session was chaired by Pierre Jean Coulon, President of the TEN Section and a video-message was sent by Alexis Chatzimpiros, Adviser on Energy - Climate/Islands, Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions.



A full house: delegates at the conference

The first panel entitled: "Sectoral policies for socio-economic development in islands" was moderated by Pierre Jean Coulon. Group III member, Meelis JOOST (EE) made a very interesting presentation about Transport: urban mobility and TENT. During the debate, other speakers also mentioned topics as: Smart specialization for future island policy, Agriculture in the islands, Entrepreneurship, Digital Agenda, Energy and Security.

The Second panel: "Increasing competitiveness in islands" was moderated by Jan Simons and opened with a presentation by Evangelos Myrsinias, President of the Chamber of Commerce of Lesbos: The title of his intervention was: "Taxation of insular SMEs/VAT". During the debate, Small Islands, the need for tailored-made measures, Trade, Taxation and Health Policy, were amongst the main topic discussed.

In the final session the conclusions remarks were given by Ivan Jakovčić, Member of the European Parliament (ALDE), Nikolaos Isaris, Deputy Head of Unit, DG CNECT, European Commission and our Group III member Alfred GAJDOSIK (AT).



Vice-President of GR III, Benedicte FEDERSPIEL (DK) with the newly elected President of Consumers International, Bart Combée, the CEO of the Dutch consumer organisation Consumentenbond

"UNLOCKING CONSUMER POWER: A NEW VISION FOR THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE" 18-21 NOVEMBER 2015 - BRASILIA, BRAZIL

Consumers International which is the World Federation of 240 consumers' organisations in 120 countries just finished its World D Congress 2015 in Brasilia, Brazil. The Congress is a once in 4 years event that brings together leaders in consumer rights and empowerment with key influencers and stakeholders to explore challenges and opportunities faced by consumers in the Global Marketplace. The theme of the Congress "Unlocking consumer power: A new vision for the Global Marketplace" was echoed by the opening of the Congress by the President of Brazil Dilma Rouseff greeting the more than 700 delegates from all over the world.

The opening session heard a message from UN general secretary Ban Ki-moon delivered by the director Guillermo Valles of international Trade in Goods and services, UNCTAD. Ambassador Valles has been holding posts in China, the UN and WTO. The European Union is dear to his heart and he has been a formidable negotiator for several trade agreements. In a special session on Trade we discussed both the TTIP and the new draft Trade strategy of the EU Commission which the EESC is also giving its opinion on.

Also deputy director, Hugh Stevenson, International Consumer Protection, US Federal Trade Commission – a Harvard Law School graduate - who is the head of the US delegation in the OECD consumer policy committee talked on his special interest topic of Security and Privacy in the Digital economy. Many other topics were discussed: for instance, growth of the collaborative economy, innovation in redress, more support to further sustainable consumption, how to drive responsible

lending. Participants in particular liked the sessions on success stories from members, among them marketing, access to basic rights and services, promoting healthy diets etc.

Again, the Danish Consumer Council had great success with the YouTube video on the shop assistant in the bakery who with the help of hidden camera shocks the costumers asking for their private data and information on where they were yesterday when they are buying bread. None of them realised that this is what is possible on the internet. The video is translated to many European languages and will soon also be translated into Chinese and Russian.



Important meetings were held on car safety, a partnership between CI and the World Wide Web Foundation on a People's Charter for the Internet was launched plus a new global campaign #AntibioticsOfftheMenu# cutting antibiotics from the meat supply. The most important issue in the near future for consumers

International and consumers globally is to get the revised UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection - concluded by UNCTAD - through the UN General Assembly at the earliest opportunity. Consumers International also supports that – at an appropriate time - the UN will officially recognise 15th of March as UN World Consumer Rights Day.

For more information please see:
<http://www.consumersinternational.org/news-and-media/world-congress-2015/>



Vitas MACIULIS (LT)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

"SEVENTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM" 20-21 NOVEMBER 2015 IN KIEV, UKRAINE

The 7th Annual Assembly of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum took part 19-21 November 2015 in Kyiv, Ukraine. The motto of event "Moving reforms in testing times" well reflected mood and discussions at the event. 6 countries participate at EU – Eastern Partnership movement: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belorussia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine: very different countries and very different ways of approaching and understanding EU values. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have more or less successful movement to EU, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belorussia has more problems and fewer possibilities to be together in EU family. The debates and resolutions of the Forum reflected these differences.

The agenda of Forum reflected the main problems and developments in partner countries. One of most common of them was systemic corruption that prevents economic and social development in these countries. The measures in place and first results of Ukrainian authorities, presented during panel discussion, were impressive and were received with cautious optimism. Information provided by the Moldavian participants graphically indicated the dramatic situation in their country. The Green Economy and Sustainability as well as Energy Security and Energy Union were other themes, which were actively discussed in parallel sessions. A study "Energy union and energy security in EaP countries" which was prepared by NGO "National Endowment for Democracy" was presented and reflected insufficient possibilities of countries to provide themselves with adequate stability and security of energy supply.

Protecting human rights and involving civil society into policy, as well as social entrepreneurship ideas, were also discussed in depth and positive experiences and best practices of some members of the Forum were shared. Finally the new leaders of EaP groups were elected and 9 Resolutions concerning Food Safety, Climate change, Persons with Disabilities, Students rights and democracy situations in Moldova, Azerbaijan and Armenia were adopted.

Members of EESC De Lotto, Adamczyk, Fornea and I actively participated in discussions and helped participants to understand importance of civil society involvement and dialogue between social partners in acceleration of democratic, social and economic progress in EaP countries.

Quote of the month...



"Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face."

Victor Hugo (1802 - 1885)

(for Liam)

Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 6-7-8 October 2015 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.



Pavel TRANTINA (CZ) – NAT/650 “Continuing education and training (CVET) in rural areas” (EESC opinion 6815/2015)

Recognising that the EU has no direct powers in the fields of education or vocational training and that education systems vary between Member States; the EESC wishes to highlight a common European problem concerning the provision of Continuing (Vocational) Education and Training (CVET) in rural and remote areas across Europe, which needs to be addressed at the European, national and regional levels.

A new Pan-European agenda is required to encourage European institutions and national governments, along with businesses, trade unions and other civil society organisations, to improve cooperation so that CVET can be accessed by employees undergoing training and their employers. This should occur close to the place of employment and in environments compatible with it. Competent authorities should promote and encourage this cooperation and make sure it is adequately funded.

There is a requirement to develop new CVET and Vocational Qualifications for micro- and small businesses based on empirical evidence of the tasks that are actually carried out in these businesses. Training for rural businesses must be delivered locally, using ICT and other broadband delivery mechanisms. To achieve this, universal access to high-speed mobile and terrestrial broadband in rural and remote areas should be treated as “essential infrastructure”.

The long-term financial support of local groups by national/regional governments will help coordinate the process of identifying and meeting local needs.

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>

News from Group III



At the Extraordinary Group III meeting on Monday 16 November 2015, Mr Henning vom Stein, Head of the Brussels Office of the Bertelsmann Stiftung was our guest speaker. Mr vom Stein presented the principal conclusions and recommendations of a study commissioned to Bertelsmann Stiftung by the Various Interests Group of the EESC. The final study, which was published in September 2015, was entitled ‘Reshaping Europe: Civil Society's Perspective of the Europe of Tomorrow’ and shares the same title as a conference organised by the Various Interests Group at the EESC on 23 and 24 June 2015. In his presentation, Mr vom Stein stressed that to overcome Europe's problems, it is necessary to adhere to a new type of governance which should directly involve civil society participation. This is especially necessary at the national level. The Head of the Brussels Office highlighted that the work of the Group over the last five years has underlined the necessity for a new approach in Europe and that the multiple crises facing the EU have inadvertently provided the opportunity to stock-take on the EU's priorities, strengths and weaknesses.

The EESC's study on Reshaping Europe can be accessed here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/qe-02-15-411-en-n.pdf>

To read the Bertelsmann Stiftung study entitled: ‘Social Policy Reforms in the EU: a Cross-national Comparison’ please click here:
http://www.social-inclusion-monitor.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Social_Justice_in_the_EU_2015.pdf



On 16 November 2015, Luis Planas, the EESC Secretary General, addressed Group III members during the first extraordinary meeting of the Group under the new mandate 2015 – 2020. He presented the latest developments within the interinstitutional relations at EU level since the start of the Juncker Commission and he explained the details of the cooperation agreement signed between the Committee and the EP in 2014. “The future of the EU is not very clear”, he stated, “but there is an optimistic approach, if the EU goes forward with more integration and more centralisation of powers, the EESC will prove its added value”.

He continued: “in particular, there is a need for better practical implementation of EU rules in the member States: EESC members and their national networks can certainly help evaluating how implementation was carried out in the past and, on this basis, contribute to developing a political approach on common points and issues. It should be a grassroots approach carried out in the field, different from the professional assessments done by other operators and various think tanks. The EESC will also continue playing its consultative role in the framework of a good cooperation with the European Commission and the European Parliament – a closer cooperation with the Council is still to be achieved in the future.”



A heartfelt goodbye to our dear colleague Liam, who over the last twelve years has brought the Irish love of life to our team and Group. Your laughter, intelligence and music will be very much missed by all of us!
Do not forget us in your retirement!
With much affection,
your colleagues

OUR GROUP'S STRENGTH



The **Farmers' Category** held their third and last meeting for this year on Thursday 19 November 2015. Given the start of the new mandate of the Committee, 2015-2020, a new list of members was established, from whom, a new Spokesperson was elected. He is a member from Ireland, **John BRYAN (IE)**, who is a former President of the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) and former Vice-President of COPA-COGECA. The members of the category also had a preliminary discussion about the possible content of their work programme for 2016.

On Monday 23 November 2015, the **SMEs, Professions & Crafts Category** met for the second time this year. In view of the recent renewal of the Committee for the 2015-2020 mandate, a fresh list of members was established. It was foreseen that a new Spokesperson would be elected from the 3 members who had previously presented their candidature and draft programmes. However, due to the security situation in Brussels and the subsequent travel difficulties, not enough members were present to proceed to a vote. Members took the occasion to make a short tour de table to introduce themselves and outline some working priorities for the Category in the coming years. The election of the spokesperson will now take place on 9 December 2015.

The **Consumers and Environment Category** met for the third and final time this year, also on Monday 23 November 2015. In view of the recent renewal of the Committee for the 2015-2020 mandate, a fresh list of members was established. The outgoing spokesperson **Reine-Claude MADER (FR)** gave an overview of the main activities of the category during the last mandate. Then, the members proceeded to the appointment of the new Spokesperson. There were two candidates, **Michel DUBROMEL (FR)** and **Bernardo HARNÁNDEZ-BATALLER (ES)**. Mrs. Mader announced that both candidates had agreed to work as co-spokespersons and they were duly elected by acclamation.

Mr Dubromel took over as chair and a number of members intervened and thanked Mrs Mader for her skilful stewardship of the category over the past number of years. Each member presented themselves briefly in turn and this was followed by a brainstorming session to come up with ideas for the list of priorities of the 2016 work programme. At the end of the morning, Luis Lobo from the INT Secretariat, updated the members about the planning and preparations for the ECD 2016 (European Consumers Day) event, which is due to be held at the EESC on 3 March 2016.

The **Social Economy Category** held their third and last meeting for this year on Wednesday 25 November 2015. Given the start of the new mandate of the Committee, 2015-2020, a new list of members was established, from whom two new co-Spokespersons were elected: **Krzysztof Balon (PL)** and **Alain Coheur (BE)**. Jointly, they will steer the work of the Social Economy Category until the mid-term renewal in April 2018.

Following their election, the members had an initial discussion on the Category's Work Programme for 2016. Next, Janusz Galeziak, Minister Counsellor for Employment and Social Affairs, Polish Permanent Representation to the EU, presented Poland's National Programme for Social Economy Development. This was followed by a presentation of new GECES work programme by Patrick Klein, DG GROW, European Commission.

In conclusion, the members discussed a variety of topics under the agenda item “other Business”, including the recent activities of the European Parliament Intergroup and of the UN Task Force on the Social and Solidarity Economy, an update on the proposal for an Own-initiative Opinion on ‘The External Dimension of Social Economy’ and the possibility of updating the EESC Study on ‘The Social Economy in the EU’.

