



Europe III

The voice of Group III
Various Interests
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A need for simpler and better law making that is more transparent, nearer to the citizens and involving their participation

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Editorial



Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT)
Member of the Various Interests Group, Rapporteur for the EESC own-initiative opinion INT/754

At its last Plenary Session, on 22 April 2015, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted an own-initiative opinion which I proposed on **Self-regulation and co-regulation in the Community legislative framework**. The main aim of this Opinion was to fill an important gap in the legislative framework of the EU. Actually many stakeholders have felt, due to the exponential increase in EU regulations and directives, that there was a need for simpler and better law making, more transparent and nearer to the citizens and with their participation. In various fields and in a number of national and international bodies, self-regulation and co-regulation have long been considered a vital supplement to regulation by other bodies, in order to ensure that a range of economic and social activities are properly regulated.

At EU level, however, it has been the EESC - chiefly through its Single Market Observatory - which has been the most committed in defining and highlighting the role of self-regulation and co-regulation. To assist in its work, under the auspices of the SMO it has even set up a database on self-regulation and co-regulation which it has been kept updated with the various national and EU experiences in this field. The

subject has, in the meantime, been dealt with in depth in academic circles, by eminent professors, especially in the field of contract law, corporate governance, social responsibility, internet, e-commerce, product safety, professional services, the environment, advertising and the audio-visual sector in the single market.

However, what was still lacking at EU level was a political-legislative discussion to clearly define the legal framework that should govern the operation of these instruments at EU level which should lead to the definition of their legal nature, lay down conditions for their validity, define their areas of application, clarify links with hard law, and set down their limits in a consistent, coherent and harmonised framework. This has been the subject of the now adopted Opinion where Self-regulation and co-regulation are viewed as important instruments for complementing or supplementing hard law, but not as an alternative to it.

Besides, the opinion states that in order for them to be a valid, recognised regulatory instrument, their configuration and ambit must be defined by specific precepts legally binding and enforceable, at Community level, respecting at the same time the nature of these instruments,

especially the voluntary agreement of the participants. The parameters for recognising these regulatory instruments must also be quite clear, as must the principles governing them and their limits as an accessory regulatory instrument in the EU legal system.

The opinion defines the general principles for both self-regulation and co-regulation which should include among others, compliance with EU and international law, including international trade agreements; transparency; representativeness and prior consultation of the parties directly concerned; added value for the general interest; control by Community and national judicial bodies; monitoring of the degree and success of their implementation, using objective criteria and reliable indicators defined in advance and specified according to sectors and objectives; checks and follow-up of their implementation by preventive measures or sanctions, in order to ensure their effectiveness; provision of a system of fines or other penalties, such as expulsion or loss of accreditation of participants; possibility of periodic review in the light of changing situations, legislation and the aspirations of their signatories and clear identification of financing sources.

If these requisites are met, the Opinion agrees that the Inter-institutional Agreement (IIA) can be the right place to deal with the definition of the role and scope of self and co-regulation at Community level, provided that it is structured as a specific instrument under the terms of Article 295 TFEU; redefines basic concepts in line with the most recent guidance in the field, which distinguishes self-regulation and co-regulation and recognises intermediate forms such as those promoted by EU recommendations and communications; and stipulates clearly that it must be possible for any ensuing disputes to be dealt with by extra-judicial dispute settlement systems.

The opinion also states that the IIA could usefully be supplemented by a recommendation to the Member States encouraging them to adopt the same principles and precepts at national level.

Bearing in mind that the Commission already announced its intention of reviewing the IIA in its Working Program for 2015, the opinion calls on the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and the Member States to give priority to this revision according with the main guidelines proposed in this opinion, and asks to refer the proposed revision to it for an opinion.

SPECIAL FEATURE: European Citizens' Initiative Day



Anne-Marie SIGMUND (AT)
Member of the
Various Interests Group
Former Group President 1998-2004
Former President of the EESC 2004-2006

On 13 April 2015, the EESC played host for the fourth time to ECI Day (European Citizens' Initiative Day). The event amply demonstrated the widespread recognition the Committee enjoys for its important role as facilitator and communicator in this innovative initiative, which has created the world's first transnational medium for participatory democracy.

The prestige and importance the Committee has garnered for its part in the smooth running and promotion of citizens' initiatives is reflected in the roster of senior figures from the institutions attending, with Frans Timmermans, European Commission vice-president, being the first to speak, followed by Emily O'Reilly, the European ombudsman. The two European Parliament rapporteurs on the ECI (György Schöpflin for AFCD and Beatriz Becerra for PETI) completed the first round of speeches, chaired by EESC President Henri Malosse.

Eighteen Committee members took part, including three members of the ad hoc group on the ECI, who acted as moderators.



Mrs Sigmund at the open space workshops

The format of the 4th ECI Day was a radical departure from previous editions. Instead of the traditional arrangement with clearly distinguished roles for speakers and audience, followed by

question and answer sessions, the set-up this time was more dynamic and open, with open space workshops maximising opportunities for participation. This gave everyone the chance to suggest topics and discuss them in small working groups, generating an extremely wide range of questions for discussion and ultimately for everyone to vote on.

There was a very lively response to the event in the social media, with a number of partner sites publicising and streaming the ECI Day, most importantly the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS), the ECI Campaign site and people2power. We had more than 1.400 Twitter mentions

(including from Commissioner Timmermans), making it the EESC's second most tweeted event. Add to all this some extraordinary media coverage: a report on the Euronews television channel gave a good overview of the day and there were articles in ECI-Campaign, Swiss-Info, Euractiv and EUREporter.

As for the actual substance of the event: participants agreed that the Commission's ECI communication of 31 March (the evaluation report) was disappointing in failing to take account of obstacles or difficulties that had arisen in the procedures. However, the Commission report did acknowledge that some technical procedures could be improved to raise effectiveness. The hurdles identified mostly concerned the legal

status of the citizens' committees behind initiatives, the registration of their applications, the timetable for examining these and the different methods (depending on Member States) for collecting signatures online. Commissioner Timmermans was receptive to the concerns and said the Commission would seek to get the rules changed. He did point out, however, that it was the Member States and the European Parliament that would have the last word.

The Committee injected a positive note at this point, offering to ensure the translation into 23 languages of each ECI validated by the European Commission. This was very warmly welcomed not just by the organisations and activists, but also by the Commission itself, which would thus be

spared a very time-consuming task. The European Parliament also welcomed this very practical initiative from the Committee.

The event concluded with participants agreeing unanimously that the Committee had found and consolidated its place in the ECI process and that its collaboration with the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) was "a step in the right direction".

"The vital need to step up the communications effort around the Citizens Initiative to encourage better interest in, and understanding of, this valuable tool for active citizenship was a very clear conclusion from the EESC gathering. The audience also warmly welcomed the President's announcement that the EESC would help cover the costs of translation of proposals"



(on the left) seated next to Commissioner Timmermans, During the opening panel, Jane Morrice (UK) Member of the Various Interests Group Vice-President of the EESC

OUR GROUP'S STRENGTH

CAN TTIP BE A TOOL FOR FOSTERING INTERNATIONALISATION OF EUROPEAN SMES?

Joint hearing of the "SMEs, Crafts and the Professions" Category and the members of the study group REX/433 "TTIP and its impact on SMEs":

On Friday 29 May 2015, the "SMEs, Crafts and the Professions" Category will meet with the members of the EESC REX study group on "TTIP and its impact on SMEs" of which Panagiotis Gkofas (EL), spokesperson of the Category, is Co-rapporteur with another member of the Category, Emmanuelle Buataud-Stubbs who is Rapporteur (Group I). The meeting will take the form of a hearing to which representatives of the European Parliament, the European Commission (namely DG GROW and DG TRADE) as well as of European and national non-EU SMEs organisations are invited to participate. The aim is to have an in-depth discuss on two main issues: Can trade agreements be a tool for promoting internationalisation of SMEs and TTIP negotiations: benefits for SMEs. It is intended that the outcome of the debates will feed into the work of the study group, which will meet the same afternoon.

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

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

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

THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Joint meeting of the Farmers' Category and the External Relations Section (REX)

On 11 June 2015, the "Farmers" Category will hold a joint meeting with the REX Section. The Section President, José María Zufaur (GR-II), will chair the opening session and welcome the

participants. The first discussion panel will focus on the main theme, with presentations of some case studies. Contributions will include: "Farmers fighting poverty", by Ignace Coussements, Secretary-General of AGRICORD; "The case for forestry" by Group III member, Seppo Kallio (FI) and "Land sustainable management" by Ousmane N'Diaye, Director of ASPRODEB. Members will then have an opportunity to pose questions.

The second thematic debate will centre around "Agricultural development: the main challenges". In this panel, which will be followed by a Q & A session, presentations will be made by Regis Meritan of the DG DEVCO/C1 (Rural Development, Food Security, Nutrition) and Jean-Phillipe Audinet, Policy and Technical Advisory Division, Fonds international de développement agricole (FIDA).

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

Highlights of the April 2014 EESC Plenary Session

Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Mr Ludvik JÍROVEC (CZ) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "New provisions of GMOs and GM food and feed" – NAT/669.

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>



Quote of the month...



"No matter how you feel, get up, dress up, show up... and never give up."

Regina Brett (1956 -)
American New York Times bestselling author, newspaper columnist, radio broadcaster and inspirational speaker
Finalist in 2008 and 2009 for the Pulitzer Prize in "Commentary"
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regina_Brett

Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role



Chairing (on mic) Lutz Ribbe (DE) Member of the Various Interests Group President of the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) at the EESC

SETTING THE AGENDA FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Two outstanding events of a global dimension are expected this year, in which the EESC, and particularly the Sustainable Development Observatory, will be playing an important role. The first is the post-2015 process, which will culminate in the adoption of new global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations General Assembly in September. It is intended that the SDGs should give a new impetus to conventional development policy, whose success, or rather lack of it, can be judged from the very disappointing implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

The second is COP 21, the UN climate change conference to be held in Paris in December, on which the EESC is currently drafting an opinion (rapporteur: Lutz Ribbe, Group III).



The essential point is this: it is not the (hopefully good and far-reaching) decisions taken at these conferences which will offer a better future and a more intact climate for us and our children, but the implementation of these decisions. And here there is clearly a role for civil society.

At the hearing on the post-2015 process, held by the Sustainable Development Observatory on 14 April, the implications of these processes for the EU were clear: in Europe too we have to take a new stand. Juncker's plan to create more jobs and more growth needs to be integrated into a long-term sustainability policy, and here major shortcomings were brought to light. All EU policies must participate in the transition to a low-carbon economy and develop fairer practices in dealings with less developed countries. This will only be possible if the world of politics and government does much more than hitherto to work with civil society on initiating appropriate joint implementation processes.

The complete programme and speeches and presentations can be found here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-un-summit-post-2015>

FIRST CROATIAN RURAL PARLIAMENT AT BELI MANASTIR, 16 - 18 APRIL 2015

The EESC delegation participated actively at the First Croatian Rural Parliament, organised by Croatian Rural Development Network - HMRR, with focus on "Perspectives for young people in rural areas". The Parliament was.../...

Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role (continued)

.../... held under auspices of EESC and Croatian Ministry of Economy, in collaboration with the Association for Creative Development Slap, the Town of Beli Manastir and LAG Baranja.

The event gathered more than 220 representatives of rural communities from all over the country to discuss possibilities and prospects for development in Croatian rural areas and to see how they can make an impact on the policies shaping their lives. There were representatives of local stakeholders - residents of local communities, small farmers, craftsmen, small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperative members, LAGs and associations active in rural development, but also local, regional and national governments. Guests from Bosnia & Herzegovina and Serbia were also present.

The main event was organised in Beli Manastir, while field workshops were held in different parts of Baranja. Situated at the East part of Croatia, bordered by the Drava and the Danube rivers – Baranja manages to preserve a unique note, vineyards and love for wines, hot peppers, special kind of fishing, traditional food and kind people.

EESC was represented by several members from all three groups. Staffan Nilsson (SE) gave a short speech during opening session, together with Visnja Jelic Mück, president of HMRR, mayor of Beli Manastir Ivan Dobos, prefect of Osijek-Baranja County Vladimir Sisljagic, representative of the President of the Croatian Parliament Domagoj Hajdukovic and Sonja Vukovic, president of Association Slap. After opening session, Rural café was organised, during which participants exchanged views on various topics. The evening ended with the presentation of LAGs. Tradition and gastronomy of Baranja was presented, but also specialities from other parts of Croatia.

During the second day, Jan Olson, Antonio Polica and Davor Majetic participated at the round table "Development of rural Croatia in programming period 2014-2020", together with four Croatian MEPs and representatives of Croatian ministries of agriculture and tourism. Jan Olson also participated at the closing session.

Thematic field workshops at eight locations were organised, as well. Roman Haken (CZ) and myself presented the CLLD, actively participating at one of the field workshops "Role of local community in rural development", which was held at the Novacic family farm, situated in a typical Baranja village of Popovac. Other workshops were dedicated to following topics: Eco-social economy in rural areas, where Jan Olson also participated; Challenges and possibilities of agricultural production; Sustainable tourism as a development initiator; Energy efficiency and renewable energy sources; Creative industries, innovations, new technologies and IT possibilities; Role of academic community in development of rural areas and Role and perspectives of rural parliaments.

National and local media expressed the interest to speak with EESC delegation, including national public TV and radio. "Extremely positive experience both for the EESC and for the local organisations and citizens, which need to feel close the European institutions. Good impact on regional and national media. I propose to keep alive this contact." said Antonio Polica.

The first Croatian rural parliament concluded with the adoption of the Declaration, which will be sent to decision-makers at national and local levels. Also, a message from rural Croatia will be sent to the Second European

Parliament to be held in November 2015 in Austria. Parliament has proved to be the excellent place to hear the voice of rural Croatia, talk about the possibilities and perspectives of rural areas, present good practices and motivate residents to be involved in shaping rural development policy and to strengthen partnerships and links among all sectors.

(front row first on the left) Group III member Lidija Pavic-Rogošic



Georges CINGAL (FR)
Member of the Various Interests Group

LAUNCH OF EUROPEAN RED LIST OF BEES: FOSTERING BEE-FRIENDLY AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES - 20 APRIL 2015

The recent release of the European Red List of Bees had found that 9.2% of Europe's 1,965 wild bee species were threatened with extinction. This trend affects a broad variety of stakeholders, given the bee's key role in the pollination of crops and wild flowers, which is essential to society and agriculture.

Pollination provides not only economic value, but it is also essential for securing food production and delivering important ecosystem services. The intensification of agriculture has been identified as one of the main culprits for the decline of bee species, but at the same time, the agricultural sector is most affected by a decline in pollination services from bees.

In order to discuss the potential for and benefits of bee-friendly practices in the context of modern agriculture, a panel discussion was organised as part of the Launch of the European Red List of Bees event in Brussels on 20 April 2015, co-organised the European Commission, IUCN and the STEP project. Representing a wide range of views and experiences, the panel brought together conventional and alternative farmers, bee scientists, environmental NGOs, bee keepers and land owners, the panel reacted to the main threats to bees from agriculture, as outlined by Ana Nieto (European Biodiversity Conservation Officer, IUCN EU Representative Office) and Stuart Roberts (Visiting Research Fellow, University of Reading, UK), both among the report's authors, at the start of the conference.

All panellists highlighted the potential of better dialogue between farmers, beekeepers and policy makers. Sebastien Windsor (COPA-COGECA) encouraged the exchange of dialogue between all stakeholders. Mr. Windsor noted the importance of site specific solutions, and of actively engaging with local beekeepers to understand the effects of choosing bee-friendly crops or using insecticides in a way that minimizes their effects on bees. Thierry de l'Escaille, Secretary General of the European Landowners Organisation also stated that, in his view, modern farming inevitably required pesticides, but that the right balance needed to be found between productivity and biodiversity conservation.

Valentin Beauval from the international farmers' movement Via Campesina and Noa Simon-Delso (Beelife & CARI), on the other hand, reminded participants that there are many alternatives to the use of pesticides which are well researched in Europe, but to date, their use remains limited due to a lack of understanding. Mr Beauval pointed to his 30-year experience as a farmer, during which time he barely ever had to resort to using pesticides. Both speakers emphasised that an environment which is nurturing for bees will also foster biodiversity more generally, and stressed that growing food in a mindful and bee-friendly manner can be achieved in an economically sustainable way.

For Simon Potts, STEP Project Coordinator and Professor for Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services, University of Reading (UK), bee-friendly practices could lead to improved crop yields and quality. He emphasized that preserving bees makes business sense for farmers, but that the economic value of bees needs to be better demonstrated and communicated to them. Prof Potts put the added value of pollinators at 22bn Euros/year in Europe, and emphasized that wild bees, rather than domesticated honeybees, provide the majority of these services.

Panelists also emphasized that considerable work remained to be done on the policy side to ensure the protection of bees, particularly in terms of the flexibility afforded to Member States in implementing the new Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), which came into force on 1 January 2015. Faustine Defossez, Senior Policy Officer at the European Environmental Bureau reminded participants that the current greening provisions of the CAP, while green on paper, were an 'empty shell', and not adequate for protecting biodiversity or reversing the decline in bees.

Another point addressed at the conference was the lack of bee experts in Europe, which has led to more than 56% of the species assessed under the European Red List to be categorized as 'Data Deficient'. In order to ensure better data on wild bees, Denis Michez from the University of Mons (Belgium) called for better support of taxonomy at local and population level, and suggested methodologies and structures to involve citizens in the monitoring of bees in Europe.

The event was co-hosted by Georges Cingal (FR), Member of the EESC. Other speakers included Bas Eickhout, Member of the European Parliament and European Commission speakers François Wakenhut, Head of Unit, Biodiversity, DG Environment; Sofie Vandewoestijne, Policy Officer, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, DG Research & Innovation; Krzysztof Sulima & Emmanuel Petel, DG Agriculture and Rural Development; Patrizia Pitton, Pesticides and Biocides, DG Health and Food Safety.

Concluding remarks were provided by Alojz Peterle, Member of the European Parliament.

See here for the full agenda of the conference: http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/agenda_launch_of_european_red_list_of_bees_20_april_2015.pdf



(On the left) Miguel Angel Cabra de Luna (ES)
And (on the right) Arianne Rodert (SE), Vice-President of GR III
Coordinator of the "Social Enterprise" Project – INT735

SOCIAL ECONOMY INTERGROUP OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT MEETS AT THE EESC

The Social Economy Intergroup is a platform for exchange between members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and members of the civil society. It represents an essential link into the democratic process of the European Union. On 22 April, they held a meeting at the EESC and, in his intervention, Miguel Angel Cabra de Luna (ES), spokesperson of the Social Economy Category, outlined the Category's work and highlighted EESC's efforts to put social economy high on the EU political agenda. He also committed to continue working closely with the Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup to that effect and to push for a renewed and holistic strategy for the promotion of social entrepreneurship in Europe.

In his concluding remarks Miguel Angel said: "I would like to take this opportunity to urge the members of the Social Economy Intergroup to continue putting pressure on the European Commission so that a proper a holistic action plan for the promotion of Social Economy is put in place in one way or another. As far as the EESC is concerned I can guarantee you that I and my colleagues in the Social Economy Category will continue pushing for an ambitious agenda."

The Vice-President of the Various Interests Group, Ariane Rodert (SE), also updated the assembly on the latest developments regarding the ongoing work on the "Social Enterprise Project", Phase II, for which she is Co-ordinator at the EESC.

Read about the Social Enterprise Project here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.social-entrepreneurship-make-it-happen>

More information on the EP Intergroup can be found here: <http://web.ensie.org/Ensie/RepresentationatEUlevel/ParlementEurop%C3%A9en/IntergroupSocialEconomy/tabid/1461/Default.aspx>

JUST FOR A LAUGH!



