



Long-term investment in the European economy: first steps on the road to reform?

Editorial



Michael SMYTH (UK)

Member of Group III / Former President of the ECO Section (2011-2013)

Short-termism in the financial system has been a major impediment to the provision of adequate long-term investment and is closely linked to corporate governance. Changing the incentives to promote long-term performance is not an easy challenge for policymakers. One of the most important elements of a strategy to get Europe back on a path of sustainable growth is securing an adequate supply of long-term finance at reasonable cost. The Commission's recent Green Paper on long-term finance focuses on productive investment and the formation of long-lived tangible and intangible capital as well as on the need to finance more "socially useful" capital investment.

The recent recapitalisation of the EIB in March of this year has strengthened its ability to leverage additional private investment finance and to play a stronger countercyclical role in investment funding and credit supply to SMEs. While a €10 billion capital injection is a significant boost, it is surely well short of what is needed in the present circumstances.

What is the Green Paper likely to achieve? First there is some good news. As a follow-up to the Green Paper consultation, the Commission has now drawn up a set of legislative proposals to create a European Long-Term Investment Funds

(ELTIF) which will channel institutional (i.e. pension funds and life insurance companies) and retail investor finance into longer term, sustainable projects such as cross-border energy networks, road and rail transport infrastructures, research and innovation, education, venture capital finance, social enterprises etc. This should be music to the ears of those of us who attended the Group III conference on "The Credit Crunch and Shrinking Savings", in June of this year. At last there is a possibility of creating an EU wide framework for long-term investment funds. The opinion on ELTIFs, ECO/354 will be debated at the October plenary and it fully endorses and supports the Commission's approach.

And now the bad news! Why has it taken so long to put together proposals for a market for such long-term investment funds? If it is in response to the short-term investment behaviour that caused the financial crisis, then why has it taken six years of gestation? But enough of this cynicism. These ELTIFs are badly needed right now and so let us wish them a fair wind.

The Green Paper consultation is also expected to bring forward further proposals to address shortcomings in the European savings market. Again this is long overdue but most welcome. Citizens and households have been suffering

from many years from what is termed financial repression due to very low rates of interest on savings. Some Member States have been quite successful in incentivising pension related and other savings by astute use of the personal taxation system. Citizens tend to balk at the prospect of paying tax on income earned and then more tax on long-term savings out of this post-tax income. In the context of socially responsible investment, it should be possible to design and market suitable low or zero tax personal savings products with appropriate annual limits so as to encourage greater long-term financial planning.

Another aim of the Green Paper is to tackle the root causes of short termism in financial markets. Most of the incentives for fund managers, investment bankers and corporate executives have tended to be short-term in nature. Changing these incentives to encourage greater levels of long-term performance will not be an easy task. The Green paper contains a number of interesting suggestions including enhanced voting rights and dividends for long-term investors and modifications to the shareholders rights directive. Perhaps a more proactive use of capital gains tax allowances might be one means of encouraging longer term shareholding by fund managers. In terms of lending to SMEs, we

can expect a number of initiatives to flow from the Green paper. For instance pension funds and the insurance industry are willing to play a more prominent role in providing finance for SMEs but the present regulatory and incentives regimes are not conducive to such a role. Action at European level to resolve these difficulties can be expected in the months ahead.

In terms of enhancing the take up of venture capital the EESC has already proposed that the European Investment Fund (EIF) role should be enlarged beyond providing loans to businesses to include the provision of venture capital. This was what its creators originally envisaged back in 1994. If the EIF, like the EIB, were to be adequately recapitalised then it could become one of the main providers of venture finance for SMEs.

To sum up, even though the hour is late, the Commission has begun to tackle seriously some of the issues that resulted in the financial crisis. Their task is formidable. Irrevocable damage has been done to the industrial structures of many Member States and it will take a long time and a lot of perseverance to overcome national regulations and interests to create a sustainable platform for both long-term savings and investments.

Interview



JOHANNA NYMAN

European Youth Forum Board member responsible for the League of Young Voters

What you need to know about the League of Young Voters

Europe III: Who is behind the initiative and what do you hope to achieve?

The League of Young Voters in Europe is a non-partisan initiative which aim is to inform young people about the European Parliament elections and the issues discussed during the election campaign. It encourages young people to voice their concerns, and alert political parties and candidates to address these during the election campaign. The League of Young Voters aims at breaking the vicious circle where young people feel that they are not heard and so not voting and politicians not paying a lot of attention to young people and their issues, as they are not an active voting demographic. Overall, the League is an election platform designed by young people, for young people. The League's main objective is to inform young voters and to

highlight the importance of young people as a voting group to political parties. Motivating young people to vote is a secondary objective of the League, but comes after the need for an electoral platform with information directly produced for young people.

The League of Young Voters is an alliance of organisations interested in and working directly on the topic of youth and their participation in European elections. In addition to the European Youth Forum, which is the main driving organisation behind the project, the International Debate Education Association and Votewatch Europe are also founding members of the coalition. In addition to this, as the League of Young Voters will be a wider umbrella movement of youth campaigns across the EU's 28 members states, national youth councils will create branches of the League

at national and regional level, and international youth organisations will run their own youth related campaigns under the umbrella of the League of Young Voters.

Europe III: What are the main actions that you are planning within your campaign?

The League of Young Voters was officially launched at the YO!Fest at the European Parliament in May 2013. The official website can be found online (www.youngvoters.eu) in its first phase, which consists of the collection of young people's issues of interest. As part of an official agreement with the four main European political parties (EPP, PES, ALDE, EGP), these will be forwarded to the European political parties as issues identified as important for young people in the context of their electoral campaigns for 2014. Additional tools will be added gradually as the campaign moves forward, such as a

Interview of the month continued..

comparative table of positions of European political parties on youth issues and a web-experience for young people to fully understand the European elections. The League will function both on the European, on the national level and in the international dimension through the different branches that at the moment are established.

A report on youth absenteeism in the European Parliament election, to be published in November 2013 in cooperation with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), and the launch of a youth-focused Votematch tool (myvote2014.eu) are also part of the League's activities.

Furthermore, the League of Young Voters will work on trainings for young candidates for the European elections 2014, and will play an active organising role at the European Youth Event 2014, an event organised for young people with the European Parliament.

Europe III: What do you think are the reasons for the low youth participation in elections? Would lowering the voting age to 16 help?

The main reason for the low voting turn is the feeling amongst young people of being disconnected from the political debate, even if our research shows that young people are interested in politics. Young people are approaching politics in a new way and younger generations no longer experience the socialisation process through political parties as much as before. Instead, they favour more direct and individualised forms of engagement. There is also a failure of political parties to engage with young people during their electoral campaigns and to use the tools that young people use. Lowering the voting age to 16 could very well

help increase the participation of young people in elections in the long run. We believe that this should be accompanied by adequate measures to improve citizenship education, in order to get young people familiarised with participation and their citizenship at a young age. We believe that strengthening access to citizenship education can only have a positive impact on the participation of young people at elections in Europe.

Europe III: Do you think that there is a danger that young people, in countries suffering severe cut-backs, might be drawn towards right-wing nationalistic parties? Are you planning any counter-measures or information campaigns to prevent this from happening?

The League of Young Voters is an information, communication and empowerment campaign. We plan to provide young voters with all the information they need in order to vote in an informed manner. League of Young Voters is non-partisan, we will not take a position on these issues. However, it is up to the political parties to engage with young people, through campaigns such as the League of Young Voters, and convince young people that such right-wing nationalistic parties do not provide the answer to their issues.

Europe III: What are the main concerns of young people regarding the EU?

The main issue found by the League of Young Voters in its research is that young people do not feel that Europe can really contribute to improving their daily lives. The hot topic for young people in the context of the electoral campaigns for 2014 will most likely relate to youth employment, and political parties should offer solutions for the creation of quality jobs for young people in Europe.

Europe III: What role can the EU Institutions like the EESC play to help you to achieve your goals and get the message out?

The EESC can mobilise and work with civil society, trade unions and employers, to support and promote campaigns for young people for the European elections, and ensure a civil dialogue to improve their participation in EU decision-making processes. The EESC can also help by pushing political parties to ensure that they target young people in their political campaigns and open up to alternative forms of participation, such as the League of Young Voters, and improve the political offer of European political parties with regards to youth-related issues. Cooperate with us to get out information and encouragement to as many young people in Europe as possible!

To read about the profile and work of LYV, please go to: <http://www.youngvoters.eu/eu/about>



Quote of the month...



"Without music, life would be a mistake."

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche
(1844 – 1900)
German philologist, philosopher, cultural critic, poet and composer.

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



Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT AT THE CORE OF THE UN HIGH LEVEL MEETING IN NEW YORK



On 23 September 2013, the UN General Assembly in New York held a High-Level Meeting on disability and development at the UN headquarters, with statements from over 50 Member States, UN Agencies and civil society. In his capacity as Chair of the International Disability Alliance (IDA), EDF President, Group III member, Yannis Vardakastanis (EL) (photo left), spoke on behalf of persons with disabilities at the opening of the meeting.

More information can be read here: http://www.edf-fehp.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=13855&thebloc=33009



Maureen O'NEILL (UK)
President of the SOC Section
Member of Group III

In Dublin at the end of August, the Mayor of Allium presented a set of challenges to some of Europe's leading urban practitioners. But don't worry if you've never heard of Allium – it's the fictional city we created for the URBACT Summer University (USU). Over three days around 300 city stakeholders responded to the challenge, developing Local Action Plans under themes including "Entrepreneurship", "21st Century Public Services" and "Use of mixed space." The USU forms part of URBACT's capacity building activities aimed at urban practitioners. As the EU's transnational exchange and learning programme for cities, URBACT has a strong focus on promoting social innovation and building cities' capacity to respond to the challenges they face. As well as the Dublin event, the programme operates a national training scheme for city practitioners and is piloting a programme for elected officials. These interventions recognise the need to support city stakeholders to use resources

more effectively and to get better results. URBACT promotes integrated sustainable urban development and in the current programme period it has supported almost 500 cities across Europe. The programme allows networks of cities to collaborate on tackling shared problems and the diversity of our projects reflects the breadth of challenges cities face. Integration of the Roma; mobilising parents to prevent early school leaving; sustainable food and supporting youth entrepreneurship are amongst recent and current project themes. Uniquely, we also require networks to strike a balance between competitive and convergence regions.

URBACT currently has 15 live projects in its final round. Every participating city must establish an URBACT Local Support Group (ULSG) which brings together all stakeholders relevant to the project theme. There is a strong emphasis on coproduced solutions, and the output from each city is a Local Action Plan (LAP) setting out the city's response to the project theme. At a time when we need fresh thinking, URBACT allows cities to develop, share and exchange new ideas. More importantly, it focuses on action and encourages cities to explore how they can mobilise their resources more effectively in future. For it is through new ways of working that we will find solutions to our shared challenges. As the American writer Karl Weick puts it: "We are much more likely to act our way into a new way of thinking than to think our way into a new way of acting."

Other news that matter

Group III bids a fond farewell to our member Richard who is moving on to greater things. From 1st November 2013, he will become a member of the House of Lords in London. We congratulate him on this appointment and wish him all the very best in his new function.

Onward and upward Sir Richard!



Richard BALFE (UK)



We welcome our new stagiaire to the Group Secretariat, Lina Vosyliūtė, from Lithuania. She is a Human Rights Advocate, especially passionate about the rights of migrants and Roma people. For this reason, she has been actively participating for more than 10 years within various NGOs in Lithuania, Malta, Hungary and South Africa. In 2011, she graduated from the Human Rights MA programme in Budapest based Central European University, Legal Studies Department. Lina arrives at a timely moment and is helping us organise our conference in Vilnius in October. We also look forward to working with her closely on a number of other projects and events over the coming months.

News from Group III

Im Memoriam: Marzena Mendza-Drozd



It was with profound sadness and a deep sense of shock that we learned of the untimely passing of our dear colleague, Marzena Mendza-Drozd, on Thursday 12 September. Only the day before, Wednesday 11 September, she was still among us, here in Brussels, at the meeting of the working group.

Marzena had been a member of the EESC since 2004 - from the very first day of Poland's membership of the EU. Always full of energy and ideas, Marzena was conscientious and hard-working, and did everything to ensure we could all be proud of the fruits of our labour. She wanted the EESC to be an efficient and creative institution that commanded people's respect, and this objective became the main focus of her activity. As a member of the budget group for many years, she attached great importance to the sound management of the EESC's finances. We all remember the many insightful comments and proposals she made over the years. Accomplished in discussion, Marzena not only knew how to seek compromise but also how to listen to those who had a different opinion. That is why she was held in such high esteem by EESC members and staff alike.

Marzena firmly believed that citizens' dialogue had an important role to play in today's world. For many years she was actively involved in the process of strengthening the role of civil society in Poland. She was one of the principal architects of the Polish NGO sector we know today. Among her many activities, her work as a court-appointed mediator deserves particular mention. It was a role that gave her a great deal of satisfaction, perhaps because its effects and real benefits for the people concerned were so immediately visible. Thanks to her work, many couples in the throes of divorce were able, without bitterness or drama, to agree arrangements for the joint custody of their children, with great psychological benefits for the young ones.

We paid our final respects to Marzena at her funeral ceremony in Warsaw on 21 September. We all are certain that her early departure has left a void that will never be filled.

The Group III members from Poland

The President of Group III, Luca Jahier, and the staff of the Group III secretariat join all members and colleagues in sending their sincere condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Marzena, who, like us all are trying to come to terms with her tragic and unexpected loss.

The Various Interests Group of the EESC is organising a conference in Vilnius, Lithuania, on Wednesday 23 October 2013.



Within the context of the first Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the objectives of the conference will be multiple. Firstly, to examine how the Republic of Lithuania, its civil society and citizens perceive the European Union and the role of Lithuania within the EU; secondly, to exchange views on the current and future opportunities and challenges facing the EU. Finally, sessions will be dedicated to revisiting Lithuania's expectations of EU membership and to examining the necessity for a social Europe and a Europe of citizens, notably in the run-up to the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. A wide cross-section of civil society organisations throughout Lithuania have been invited to attend.

Highlights of the September 2013 EESC Plenary Session



Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

PMr Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "Indices serving as Benchmarks in Financial and other Contracts" – INT/718.

Mrs Ariane RODET (SE) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Social impact measurement" – INT/721.

Mr Carlos TRIAS PINTO (ES) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Completing EMU - Arguments and proposals for the debate in the upcoming European elections" – ECO/357.

Mr Eugen LUCAN (RO) is the General-Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office" – SOC/491.

Mr Pavel TRANTINA (CZ) is the Co-Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Opening up Education - European Union initiative to Enhance education and skills development through new technologies and open educational resources" – SOC/493.

Mrs Renate HEINISCH (DE) is the Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Developing strategies for measures supporting the migration of young job seekers from weaker to stronger EU economies, with a view to their more effective integration in society and employment. Intercultural and intergenerational approaches" – SOC/495.

Mr Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Employment (and fiscal) effects of social investment" – SOC/496.

Mr Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL) is the President of the study group for the information report on: "Industrial Changes in the European Pharmaceutical Sector" – CCMI/119.

Mr Séamus BOLAND (IE) is the General-Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Support for rural development by EAFRD" – NAT/619.

Mr Lutz RIBBE (DE) is the Co-Rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on: "Financial instruments towards a resource efficient and low carbon economy in the EU" – NAT/620.

Mr Georges CINGAL (FR) is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species" – NAT/623.

Mr Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "The role of 'civil society' in negotiation and implementation of an EU-Japan FTA" – REX/389.

Mr Andris GOBIŅŠ is the Rapporteur for the opinion on: "European Year of Development (2015)" – REX/392.

Mr Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO) is the Rapporteur for the Ad Hoc group on: "An Action Plan for Europe"

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>

OUR GROUP'S STRENGTH



The Farmers' Category held a meeting on Wednesday 2 October 2013. Under the chairmanship of the spokesperson, Group III member Yves Somville (BE), items on the draft agenda included an overview, by Ms. Gaëlle Marion (DG Agriculture and Rural Development - Analysis of the Perspectives and Agriculture Policy Unit), of the state of play of the developments concerning the CAP 2014-2020, which was followed by a Q & A session. There was also a discussion between the members on proposals for the draft work programme of the Category in 2014 and presentations from certain members outlining the situation regarding the agricultural sector in their home countries.

The Consumers and Environment Category held an all-day meeting on Thursday 3 October 2013. Among the main agenda points were a presentation by Ms. Spanou of DG SANCO entitled: "One year after" on the evolution of the consumer agenda. Group III member, Lutz Ribbe (DE), as a President of the SDO, made a presentation of the planned study on the impact of the civil society in the different member states. The members had a discussion on the theme and draft programme of the European Consumers' Day 2014. The spokesperson, Group III member, Reine-Claude Mader (FR) invited the members to put forward ideas and suggestions for the draft work programme of the category in 2014.

The SMEs, Crafts and Liberal Professions Category will hold a meeting on Monday 28 October 2013. Amongst other points, it is foreseen that two examples of best practices on access to finance for SMEs will be presented to members who will also be updated on the current situation of Liberal Profession organisations in Turkey. The full agenda will be available shortly on our website.

The Social Economy Category will hold a meeting on Thursday 21 November 2013. The agenda will be available shortly on our website.

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

Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 18-19 September the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.



Reine-Claude MADER (FR) – INT/701 “Comparability of fees related to payment accounts, payment account switching and access to payment accounts with basic features” (EESC opinion 3958/2013)

The EESC considers that the adoption of a directive is the most suitable way of implementing measures aiming to give all citizens access to bank account and to improve the comparability of fees and banking mobility. However, the Committee regrets the restricted scope of some of the measures (e.g. harmonisation of terminology). It welcomes the provisions which aim to improve transparency, as well as the proposals on banking mobility, although believes that the latter should be preceded by an independent study and considers that a requirement for the provision of a statement of fees should be supplemented by a requirement to inform consumers in advance of the debiting of unusual fees to their account. Moreover, the EESC favours the establishment of independent comparison web sites and calls for the register of existing sites to enable consumers to have access to information on financial institutions located in all the Member States. The opinion also stresses the importance of training staff of payment service providers and the need for financial education.



Pedro NARRO (ES) – INT/705 “Making available on the market and use of biocidal products with regard to certain conditions for access to the market” (EESC opinion 4753/2013)

The European Commission's proposal helps to improve substantially the practical application from 1 September 2013 of the new Biocidal Products Regulation, clarifies the arrangements for the transitional rules and provides greater legal certainty for operators. The EESC regrets that, during the long and complex process of adopting the new European legislation on biocidal products, the Commission, the Council and Parliament have not given prior consideration to the distortions that confused and unclear transitional rules could create. The EESC agrees that changes need to be made to the Biocidal Products Regulation before it enters into force, so as to facilitate the transition from Directive 98/8/EC. In order to ensure that the system runs smoothly, a coherent framework of transitional measures enabling the system to change gradually for operators and Member States is crucial. However, the Committee welcomes the changes made to the transitional measures concerning treated articles, and the evaluation of existing active substance and biocidal products. These modifications will prevent the de facto freezing of the placing on the market of many new treated articles, to allow them on the market provided that a complete dossier to assess the active substance(s) contained in these treated articles has been submitted by 1 September 2016. These modifications will also allow a better transition to the harmonised authorisation system for existing biocidal products. With regard to the innovative provision on the mandatory sharing of studies on environmental fate and behaviour relating to Annex II of Regulation (EC) No 1451/2007, the EESC calls on the Commission to ensure that the new obligation does not distort competition or have a detrimental impact on companies' innovation capacity.



Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES) – TEN/516 “For coordinated European measures to prevent and combat energy poverty” (EESC opinion 2571/2013)

In this own-initiative opinion, the Committee calls for a European energy security and solidarity commitment within the framework of a European energy community which would drive forward a truly European policy and aim to: protect individuals and prevent their social exclusion; take action to reduce the factors of structural vulnerability; and encourage everyone to assume responsibility for using sustainable and renewable energy resources. The EESC also calls for European energy poverty indicators to be established and for statistics to be harmonised in order to identify, prevent and tackle the problem more effectively at European level. Moreover, it recommends setting up a European poverty observatory, whose main focus would be on energy poverty. It will help define European energy poverty indicators, identify best practices and draw up recommendations in this sphere. The EESC would like to see an energy market more focused on consumers, particularly the most vulnerable. The EESC recommends that the European Commission include an analysis of energy poverty in the Union in the report requested by the European Council (by the end of 2013). It calls on the European Commission to consider setting up a European energy solidarity fund. The Committee recommends that before the main measures of EU and Member States' energy policy are adopted they should be analysed in terms of the extent of their economic impact on the various categories of consumers (for example, according to income, household composition or type of heating). In conclusion, the EESC would like to promote an annual meeting of civil society organisations to discuss energy poverty and solidarity in Europe, in conjunction with the European observatory on poverty in Europe and it advocates that the European Commission organise a European energy information campaign to be run at national and local level on combating energy poverty in order to promote, in particular, education on energy efficiency and the citizen as an active energy consumer.



Richard ADAMS (UK) – TEN/522 “The future of Carbon Capture and Storage in Europe” (EESC opinion 3273/2013)

EU energy and climate policy must recognise and be responsive to global markets and international agreements. It also must develop answers when the markets fail to respond to social priorities and deal with the lack of political coherence. The debate on Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) exemplifies the tensions represented in such a policy initiative. The present global energy market is failing to take account of the massive and damaging externalities involved in the accelerating use of all fossil fuels. CCS offers a known technological process which potentially can provide an answer to the fundamental question of climate policy: before we release so much

carbon dioxide into our atmosphere that it generates devastating climate change can we bury carbon at the same rate that we extract and use it? The EESC considers this programme to be of vital strategic importance in order to pave the way for deployment. Such a programme would greatly benefit from being set in the context of a high profile, coordinated public dialogue at European level on the future of our total energy system and the need for it to make a transition to a low-carbon future. Public acceptance remains a vital issue for development of CCS infrastructure. In this context the issues of comparative effectiveness with other low carbon strategies, including CO2 re-usage, in-depth analysis of risk issues and the application of the precautionary principle can all be considered.

Richard ADAMS (UK) – TEN/529 “Nuclear safety of nuclear installations” (EESC opinion 4368/2013)

The EESC positively welcomes the timely amendments to the Nuclear Safety Directive. Citizens rightly expect verifiable high standards and consistency. The Committee is encouraged to see that several issues highlighted in our previous opinions on nuclear safety have been addressed in this proposal. These include a stronger approach to harmonisation amongst Member States, clarification of regulatory responsibilities, competence and capacity, the independence of national regulators, and action on on-site emergency preparedness and response. In particular we commend the strengthened approach to overall transparency and the drive to include specific obligations as a necessary and potentially effective contribution to dealing with public concerns. The Committee particularly welcomes the greatly enhanced approach to national regulatory responsibility, competence, application and independence which strengthens each of these areas and also provides support and verification mechanisms. The strengthening of provisions for on-site emergency preparedness and response arrangements is noted.



Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) – TEN/524 “Preparing a fully converged Audio-visual World: Growth, creation and values” (EESC opinion 4163/2013)

The Committee welcomes the Commission initiative to reopen the file on a converged audio-visual policy, with a view to taking the opportunity to broaden access to diversified European content and to launch new public consultation to address particularly this issue's impact on economic growth, employment and innovation at EU level. The EESC regrets, however, that the Commission has not seized this opportunity to put forward more tangible and structured proposals on the matter. The Committee recognises the many positive aspects of both the strategy for innovation and technological convergence of audio-visual services with the Internet, but it believes that at European level the right conditions should be created for traditional media to continue to provide their important public interest service, with a view to supporting linguistic and cultural diversity and safeguarding pluralism of information. Finally, the EESC believes that the central aims of the European debate on audio-visual convergence should be to promote European cultures and to safeguard the public interest and fundamental rights, specifically the protection of minors and other vulnerable people.

Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) – INT/656 “Better regulation: implementing acts and delegated acts” (EESC opinion 248/2013)

In this information report, the EESC highlights the realities of the delegated legislative procedure introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. It is along the same lines as the principles set out in the “Better Law-making” initiative and the subsequent European Commission's campaign for Smart Regulation. Application of TFEU Article 290 on delegated acts does however highlight the fact that reality is more complex than the proclaimed political objective of legislating more quickly and simply. In its judgment of 5 September 2012, the Court of Justice did, however, lay down what can be deemed to be substantive limits to the power of delegation – matters relating to people's fundamental rights. The Treaty of Lisbon did of course provide for control mechanisms allowing the Parliament and the Council either to revoke the delegation procedure itself, or to express an objection to a delegated act entering into force. The Commission has undertaken to work in the most transparent way possible when drafting delegated acts. Nevertheless there are still a number of outstanding questions about the transparency of the prior consultation system originating in a document which is not legally binding, entitled Common Understanding on practical arrangements for the use of delegated acts of 4 April 2011. It would seem that the latter is not enough, since the European Parliament, for example, needed to turn to the Inter-institutional Agreement on “Better Law-making” of 31 December 2003 in order to have access, as a mere observer, to the committees of experts brought together by the Commission during the drafting phase of delegated acts. The delegation procedure must allow the legislator to focus on the essential. We cannot but welcome this, as long as the powers delegated to the Commission are properly managed and implemented in a transparent fashion.



Séamus BOLAND (IE) – NAT/604 “Support for rural development/ Transitional provisions” (EESC opinion 4657/2013)

The EESC welcomes the proposal to establish transitional provisions for 2014 regarding certain rules relating to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in particular the system of direct payments and support for rural development financed from the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The EESC strongly supports the transitional arrangements for 2014 securing continuity of payments to beneficiaries in the event of a late adoption of the new rural development plans and because of the need to postpone the application of the new direct payments scheme for practical and administrative reasons. Moreover, the Committee strongly recommends that the beneficiaries of “classic” schemes located in remote upland areas should not be disadvantaged in any way by the transitional arrangements and recommends that transitional payments to these communities reflect the level of funding already agreed under the old programme. In conclusion, the EESC believes that it is imperative that specific transitional rules are adopted by the Council

and the European Parliament before the end of the year, amending the current CAP basic acts where necessary.



Gabriel SARRÓ IPARRAGUIRRE (ES) – NAT/613 “Fiscal consolidation/European Fisheries Fund” (EESC opinion 5262/2013)

The European Economic and Social Committee considers that the sustained financial and economic crisis has put national financial resources under pressure as Member States pursue necessary policies of fiscal consolidation. It therefore considers the Commission's proposal amending Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 to be necessary and very opportune, and strongly supports it.



Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO) – SOC/484 “Admission of third-country nationals – IMI” (EESC opinion 3516/2013)

The EU needs to take a new approach to economic migration, one that would allow third-country nationals to acquire knowledge and skills. The Committee underlines the need to enhance cooperation between the EU and third countries to ensure effective “brain circulation” and supports the development of mobility partnerships. The Committee also welcomes the emphasis on the fundamental rights of third-country nationals. Greater attention needs to be given to active measures to ensure their fair treatment. In practice, third-country nationals are often in vulnerable situations, especially students and au pairs. The Committee draws attention to the need to ensure appropriate protection for students, researchers, volunteers and au pairs where they are engaged in paid work or active in the labour market. It also encourages the European Commission and the Fundamental Rights Agency to assess the vulnerabilities that third-country nationals face here and put forward to the Member States active measures aimed at removing them. The Committee encourages the European Commission and the Member States to take into account the gender aspect and to configure their programmes so as to facilitate the participation of more women. The Committee believes that, in practice, a huge number of procedural and institutional obstacles continue to stand in the way of mobility. These obstacles mainly concern visa procedures, which can be costly, lengthy, unpredictable and even arbitrary. An in-depth analysis of these obstacles is needed and measures to eliminate them should be identified. The process for granting visas should be simple, fair, accessible and non-discriminatory. The Committee welcomes the provision allowing third-country nationals to stay in the Member State for 12 months upon completion of their research or studies in order to look for work. However, the equal-treatment provisions in Directive 2011/98/EU include derogations that seem to run counter to the objectives of the proposal to recast the two directives. The Committee agrees with enhancing students' access to the labour market, under the conditions set out in the directive, by enabling them to work a minimum of 20 hours per week.



Indrė VAREIKYTĖ (LT) – SOC/486 “Female employment in relation to growth” (EESC opinion 3611/2013)

Female employment should no longer be raised as another debate on gender equality, but instead as an economic imperative to bring prosperity and jobs to the European Union – a social necessity to face the challenges of demographics, social and environmental concerns to ensure sustainable growth. Policies to fully use the potential of women's contribution to growth must not only encompass the most obvious economic obstacles, but also tackle the domains of tax, benefit and pension systems, labour rights, decision-making, entrepreneurship, education, stereotypes and violence. Both women and men must play their part if such multifaceted issues are to be resolved successfully.

Amongst many recommendations and key prerequisites for achieving more female participation in employment and contribution to growth are:

- integration of the gender dimension in all EU policies;
- diminution of gender segregation in education;
- support to the transition from education to the labour market through specific training and skills development;
- empowerment of female entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and create jobs;
- provision of qualitative, accessible and affordable full-time childcare facilities;
- prevention of discrimination and harassment in the workplace and combating gender-based violence.



Michael SMYTH (UK) – ECO/349 “Long-term financing of the European economy” (EESC opinion 4038/2013)

This exploratory opinion sets out an argument that an effective way of strengthening civil society partnerships in delivering the Baltic Sea Region Strategy is through the implementation of the partnership principle as set out in the Commission's code of conduct partnership. The EESC recommends that the Baltic Sea Region Strategy could informally embrace the process outlined in the code of conduct and apply it to the on-going evolution and implementation of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy. There is sufficient organisational experience and competence in the Baltic Sea Region to build upon to undertake the enhanced monitoring role envisaged under the code of conduct.



Viliam PÁLENÍK (SK) – ECO/352 “Financial management and decommitment rules for certain Member States” (EESC opinion 5122/2013)

The EESC, in line with its previous opinions, supports this proposal provided that consistency and efficacy in the use of budgetary resources are preserved. The total funds allocated under EU cohesion policy for the 2007-13 programming period are not being increased, but effectiveness is maintained through co-financing, and the danger of automatic decommitment of funds for the years 2011 and 2012 is reduced.

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>

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