



Europe III

The voice of Group III
Various Interests
October 2016

ED
Editorial

TRADE AGREEMENTS ARE HIGH ON THE AGENDA OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE.

The TTIP negotiations entered a critical year in 2016. The EESC therefore decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion entitled 'The position of the EESC on specific key issues of the TTIP negotiations', which was adopted in the September 2016 Plenary Session.

In this frame, this month's editorial is written by **Benedicte Federspiel**, Vice President and member of the Various Interests' Group and President of the EESC Follow-up Committee on International Trade. After having been the Executive director of the Danish consumer Council for many years, Mrs Federspiel is now member of the Board of the Trans-Atlantic Dialogue between the US and EU consumer organizations and a member of the Advisory Group, set up by DG Trade to advise the European Commission on EU-US trade talks.



Benedicte Federspiel (DK)
Vice President and member
of the Various Interests' Group



Trade policy is under unprecedented scrutiny by the public, civil society and national parliaments because it is no longer expected only to be a vehicle for growth, competitiveness and jobs, but also to act as an important tool that reflects and conveys EU standards and values on social, environmental and consumer protection.

TTIP (The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) has become one of the best known abbreviations, and the EESC has issued many opinions and held many hearings on various related topics. Most members of the EESC's three groups are heavily involved in discussions on the benefits and challenges of trade agreements – both as part of and outside of their work at the EESC.

Transparency has been an important point during these discussions, – which have been ongoing since 2013 – with a view to enabling civil society to follow what is proposed and negotiated on their behalf. The Commission has gradually improved access to papers, from the publication of the mandate (a year after it was leaked) to the publication of all of its proposals when they are presented to the US partners. TTIP negotiations have shown that there is a way to achieve greater transparency in trade negotiations and form a closer partnership with civil society when shaping trade policy. Unfortunately the US is not as open with its stakeholders and much of the hostility experienced may be due to a consequent lack of confidence and trust.

Much of the public distrust in TTIP in Europe may

also be attributed to over selling arguments on how rich TTIP might make us and how many jobs might be created, at a time when it was not possible to calculate the results. Nobody knows in the middle of the negotiations which sectors might prevail/lose out. The United States Trade representative (USTR) did not make similar calculations because the US administration believed that it would not be possible to do so. I also have to admit that I was never impressed by industry which asked – repeatedly – why consumers were not pleased to get cheaper Levi's or NIKE shoes. Consumers are of course pleased to get cheaper goods, but not at the expense of data protection.



Trade unions, consumer organisations and other civil society organisations have heavily criticised the Investor to State Dispute settlement system (ISDS) which allows foreign investors to sue states. Although the Commission transformed the ISDS into the new Investment Court System (ICS) many think that this did not sufficiently remedy the problems of the old ISDS. At the same time, the US is apparently not pleased to be leaving the old ISDS system which suggests that there may be a deadlock in this area – or at the very least there is no conclusion. Generally speaking, many chapters are not yet

ready, so time has run out for TTIP to be finalised before President Obama leaves office.

There is a lot of mudslinging at the moment from the US Congress, which is very angry with the so-called "hostage taking" and "stalling tactics" from the EU, which is seen as not wanting to compromise on anything, and this does not improve the situation.

Many European civil society organisations are also worried about the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement with Canada (**CETA**), which they believe does not live up to their expected standards. The agreement will most probably be signed in October and as it is considered to be a mixed agreement and needs the ratification of national parliaments for full implementation, it will be provisionally applied in part before the final vote in the national parliaments. However, this provisional implementation of CETA will probably not include the contested investment protection part.

Finally, there will be many issues to monitor and discuss in the coming months – though TTIP will be lying low – such as an agreement on Trade in Services (**TISA**) between the EU and 22 other countries which – like CETA – has fallen off the media's radar, although some texts were leaked recently. There are also the ongoing negotiations with **Japan**.

It has been announced that on 20-21 October at the autumn summit in Brussels, EU leaders will look for a new, more citizen-friendly formula for EU trade policy. They want to try and find a way to ensure a robust EU trade policy that reaps the benefits of open markets while at the same time addressing public concerns about globalisation and social inequalities. The EESC has encouraged this debate for long time and it is certainly high time that it took place.

More info on the opinion here:
<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.rex-opinions.38266>



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEPTEMBER PLENARY SESSION

Group III members co-ordinating the



Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Artificial Intelligence - The consequences of artificial intelligence on the (digital) single market, production, consumption, employment and society (own-initiative opinion)” - [INT/806](#)

Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Interim evaluation of Horizon 2020” - [INT/807](#)

Elzbieta SZADZINSKA (PL) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “European standardisation 2017” - [INT/803](#)

Etele BARÁTH (HU) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020” - [ECO/417](#)

Seamus BOLAND (IE) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Wealth inequality in Europe (Own-initiative opinion)” - [ECO/410](#)

Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Extending the 2013-2017 European statistical programme for the 2018-2020 period” - [ECO/415](#)

Cillian LOHAN (IE) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Islands in the EU: from structural handicap to inclusive territory” - [ECO/418](#)

Christian MOOS (DE) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Establishing a Union Resettlement Framework” - [SOC/548](#)

Kinga JOÓ (HU) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Regulations on Cedefop, Eurofound and EU-OSHA” - [SOC/550](#)

Indrė VAREYKITĖ (LT) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Erasmus+ Mid-term evaluation” - [SOC/552](#)

Krzysztof BALON (PL) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “State of implementation of legal migration legislation” - [SOC/553](#)

Marina YANNAKOUDAKIS (UK) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Decisions in matrimonial matters and matters of parental responsibility and international child abduction (recast)” - [SOC/549](#)

Benjamin RIZZO (MT) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “High quality education for all” - [SOC/555](#)

Jose LEIRIÃO (PT) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “The automotive industry on the brink of a new paradigm? (Information report)” - [CCMI/148](#)

Carlos TRIÁS PINTÓ (ES) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Digitisation and innovative business models in the European financial sector, impact on employment and customers (own-initiative opinion)” - [CCMI/147](#)

Lutz RIBBE (DE) is the Co-Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “The transition towards a more sustainable European future – a strategy for 2050 (Own-initiative opinion)” - [SC/047](#)

Tom JONES (UK) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Villages and small towns as catalysts for rural development, challenges and opportunities (Own-initiative opinion)” - [NAT/698](#)

Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Ex-post evaluations of the Rural Development Programmes 2007/2013” - [NAT/699](#)

Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Application of the Decision on public compensation for the provision of services of general economic interest (2012/21/UE) (Own-initiative opinion)” - [TEN/605](#)

Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Body of European Regulators of Electronic Communications (BEREC)” - [TEN/613](#)

Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “European Electronic Communications Code (Recast)” - [TEN/612](#)

Meelis JOOST (EE) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Mid-term evaluation of the Connecting Europe Facility (formerly Smart Islands)” - [TEN/606](#)

Miguel Angel CABRA DE LUNA (ES) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “The external dimension of social economy (Own-initiative opinion)” - [REX/472](#)

Arno METZLER (DE) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “The role of Turkey in the refugee crisis (Own-initiative opinion)” - [REX/476](#)

work on new opinions

Lidija PAVIĆ-ROGOŠIĆ (HR) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: “Establishing the EFSD Guarantee and the EFSD Guarantee Fund” – [REX/477](#)

Cristian PIRVULESCU (RO) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “Establishing a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration” – [REX/478](#)

Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the Rapporteur of the study group for the opinion on: “The real right of persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections (Information report)” – [SOC/554](#)



SOC/554

3 questions on new opinion ‘The right of persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament Election’



Krzysztof PATER (PL)
Member of the Various Interests' Group
Rapporteur of the opinion

What is the purpose of this report?

The main purpose is to investigate and to present how European Parliamentary election procedures are shaped in each Member State, and how they take into account the needs of persons with various disabilities. As the main principles of these elections are set out by European Parliament and then implemented into national law, the European Union has real power to align the

rights of persons with disabilities with those of other citizens. I think that each Member State could still improve. I also believe that although improvements will only apply to the European Parliament elections at first, at the next stage they will be extended to all other forms of voting at national level – such as national and local elections and referendums.

At present, what are the main problems?

I would like to focus in this report on two areas – direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination means for me all cases where, according to national law, some individuals are not allowed to vote due to having a particular type of disability. This mostly applies to intellectual disabilities. Indirect discrimination appears when a person with disabilities is allowed to vote by law, but the technicalities of the voting procedure do not allow this person to do so in practice. An example of this would be when a person with reduced mobility is not able to get to the polling station due to architectural barriers. In other cases disabled persons are not able to tick the polling card, thereby making

their choice, and no solutions are provided to resolve this other than accompanying the person concerned. I would like to present best practices to be considered by the Member States willing to improve their regulations in this report.

What is the time schedule for this report?

As the work on this report entails collecting data from 28 Member States and all information has to be at least double checked, the work will take time. I hope it will be finished before the holidays in 2017. This will enable time for European Parliament to modify the EU rules and for Member States to modify national laws. **The purpose is to ensure that all EU citizens with disabilities will genuinely have the right to vote at the 2019 European Parliament elections.**

The full listing of membership of the above 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



Luca JAHIER (IT)
President of the Various Interests' Group

During its 519th plenary session on 22 September 2016, the EESC welcomed Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, for a debate on the State of the Union. Various Interests' Group President Luca Jahier took the opportunity to express his views on the issues the EU is currently facing.

After thanking Mr Juncker for his presence at the EESC plenary, for his determination and for the excellent programme, Mr Jahier commented on the State of the Union speech given during the September plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, and the optimistic feeling this speech had awoken in him. Mr Jahier said that Mr Juncker's statement reflected optimism, new ideas, concrete answers and politics for the citizen. A strategy for the future was projected, and the alignment with the main European Parliament party leaders had given true grounds for hope. He especially emphasised Mr Juncker's insistence on the urgent need to overcome the still very persistent divisions, to adopt common decisions, and above all implement them quickly. Mr Jahier was impressed by EPP Chairman Manfred Weber's words, which pointed the finger at Member States for not taking their responsibilities. Mr Weber had reminded Member States that, last year, **148 legislative votes had been taken in the Council, and that only in very few cases had a Member State voted against.** Mr Weber was asking the Member States to stop blaming Brussels for decisions they had adopted jointly.



A few hours after the Bratislava Summit, however, Mr Jahier's hope had turned into dark pessimism. Divisions, fatigue, ever more obvious divergences, an indicative agenda of non-binding meetings, and especially a lot of partiality. A very defensive logic, maybe at the level of the lowest common denominator, in which national agendas were more and more in conflict with each other. Mr Jahier mentioned the great common sense of geese: they stuck together in formation, and helped the other geese in the flock whenever a problem occurred. Sometimes, the Member States could take the example of the way nature worked and the good common sense shown by some of its inhabitants, such as geese. As European history itself showed, war could be stopped by working hard for peace: addressing the causes, working for reconciliation and building peace. Europe had done a great deal in the name of peace, and should continue to do so.

Finally, Mr Jahier reminded the audience that no migrant chose to leave his home; a migrant was by definition on the run. **If the EU did not help, it would lose its soul.** We needed to remind ourselves of fundamental human rights and share responsibility. We needed to work for Europe.

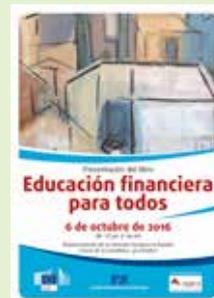


Carlos TRIAS PINTO (ES)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

FINANCIAL EDUCATION FOR ALL!

New EESC Publication

On 6 October 2016, Carlos Trias Pintó presented the **second edition of the EESC publication on Financial Education**, in Madrid. This publication is a representative selection of good practices relating to financial education offered by the highly diverse programmes and projects run by a wide range of bodies – social, educational, financial, etc. - from both the private and public sector. Taking into account the fact that current education programmes have limited reach, the aim was to enable best practices to be replicated in as many countries as possible. The idea is that this **EESC booklet-guide** will contribute to this aim.



Context

The EESC has repeatedly spoken about the need to promote financial education policies with a view to strengthening **consumer protection** in the financial markets, as well as to improving the **financial skills** needed by the population (focusing particularly on young people).

With regard to **consumer protection**, in order to improve the fragile position of the retail consumer and faced with a market that is already inundated with complex financial instruments, it is necessary to provide a comprehensive explanation of the risks that every financial product entails, taking into account the different profiles of customers.

As such, the financial industry must apply the new legislation (more specifically, MIFID I & II) properly in order to foster appropriate and honest practices, thereby making it easier to access transparent financial products.

Compulsory subject

In relation to **financial skills**, financial education should be seen as a comprehensive strategy in which all stakeholders work together in order to overcome the financial skills gap faced by young people in Europe. In fact, financial education should become a compulsory subject in the **school curriculum**, and this education has to be followed up with training and retraining programmes for entrepreneurs and workers in order to improve employability.

The financial industry itself (using its highly motivated volunteers) will face the challenge of becoming actively involved – in conjunction with other stakeholders, for instance, consumer or educational organisations – in programmes that focus on **financial planning and budgeting, financial accounting and financial risks**, etc.

More info:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-financial-education>)



Thierry LIBEART (FR)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

Full room for planned obsolescence

On 13 September 2016, La Fabrique Ecologique – a think tank – organised a conference in Paris on planned obsolescence, where Thierry Libeart presented the CCMI/112 opinion which deals with this issue. MEP Pascal Durand and Arnaud Chatin, director of public affairs at Michelin, were also among the speakers.



There was an audience of around 100 people and in fact 48 hours before the conference, the decision was taken to stop accepting registrations because the room was full. The conference was divided in two parts: all the speakers presented their views on planned obsolescence, followed by an exchange of views with the audience, and then presented possible solutions, followed by another debate. The audience was quite high level, as all of the major French environmental NGOs were present (WWF, France Nature Environnement, Fondation Nicolas Hulot), and many businesses took the opportunity

to put forward their position (Carrefour, Seb).

There was excellent media coverage, with five journalists reporting on proceedings. Both at the conference and in press articles, the point was made again and again that the EESC was the leading figure behind the first European document on this subject.

The MEPs announced that the draft resolution – which drew heavily on Mr Libaert’s opinion – had been adopted. This offered convincing proof of the EESC’s usefulness and strengthened its position among the European institutions.



Jean-Marc ROIRANT (FR)
Member of the Various Interests’ Group

A civic academy on democracy in Europe On

On 8 and 9 October 2016, representatives from associations across Europe came together with experts from the academic world in La Rochelle in France to discuss “Democracy in Europe: missing links”. Some 200 activists from civic platforms, organisations from the social sphere and the fields of human rights and the environment, and representatives from the world of culture from across Europe together addressed complex questions raised by people’s frustrations, practices and expectations relating to democracy, and in particular the “democratic deficit” in Europe.



Public disenchantment with democracy is on the rise. People perceive a growing gulf between election manifestos and the policies implemented, a lack of transparency around decision-making bodies and increased corruption due to the intermingling of economic and political interests. Our society is also characterised by rising social inequality, discrimination and fear of exclusion.

Many people are wondering whether democracy is providing an adequate framework for ensuring that their demands and aspirations are heard and taken into account, while reactionary populism is blossoming on this fertile ground.

While many people seem to be disengaging and giving up on voting or traditional forms of social struggle, at the same time we are witnessing an upsurge in democratic movements, spanning a variety of issues, forms of action and relationships, both local and global. The civil society leaders that came together in La Rochelle sought to better understand these developments in order to come up with possible solutions to help build the Europe of tomorrow.

They also expressed their solidarity and voiced their support for the activists from a number of EU Member States who came to give an account of their treatment by governments and national institutions hostile to intermediary bodies.



This first European Civic Academy, launched by the **European Civic Forum** together with other European associations, was supported by **Civil Society Europe**, a network of European civil society organisations. Civil Society Europe brings together European platforms and networks around the idea of promoting a civic space based on fundamental rights, the renewal of European democracy and the transparency of the decision-making process, including the genuine involvement of civil dialogue stakeholders.



Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)
Member of the Various Interests’ Group
President of REX section

REX – event at the WTO Public Forum

The REX section held its own event at the WTO Public Forum on 27 September 2016 in Geneva. The EESC event was very well attended. More than 50 participants debated the topic “**bringing the benefits of trade to women**”.

In general terms, the increase in trade has proven to be beneficial for both growth and jobs. However, the trade liberalisation process is not believed to be gender neutral. In order for trade to be inclusive and to fully realise the potential of trade liberalisation, trade policy at multilateral, regional and national level should consider the cultural and social obstacles that prevent women – as a particular sector of society – from enjoying the benefits that trade may offer. This session analysed the assumptions that trade is beneficial to women by 1) promoting female entrepreneurship, and 2) ensuring decent work for women participating in global supply chains (GSCs).



Mrs. Federspiel (EESC Member),
Commissioner for Trade
Mrs Malmström, Mrs Slavova
(EESC member)

The REX event focused on:

- 1) the difficulties that women encounter in setting up businesses and acquiring knowledge that enables them to participate in international trade;
- 2) the added value of networks, associations and platforms at national and regional level;
- 3) the role of governments and civil society in implementing trade agreements that strengthen the role of women in international trade through a) ex-ante and ex-post gender impact evaluation, and b) specific projects ensuring trade benefits for women;
- 4) the role of trade agreements in promoting decent work for women involved in GSCs, in accordance with ILO conventions and the 2030 Agenda, etc.;
- 5) the role that cooperation between social partners plays in promoting gender-sensitive supply chain management in sector with a high female employment rate (i.e. textile, footwear and agriculture).





Matias Carlos RAMOS (PT)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

Group III is proud to announce one of its Members, Carlos Matias RAMOS, was awarded the "Construction Personality Award 2016" in Portugal.

On 21 September, Group III Member Carlos Matias Ramos, was awarded the **"Construction Personality Award 2016"**. This prize, awarded by the Portuguese Magazine Imobiliário, aims – according to the principles set out in the regulation – "to pay tribute to personalities in the field of construction who stand out for their prestige and professionalism".

Carlos Alberto Matias Ramos is a well-known name in the Portuguese engineering sector, whose technical and scientific contributions have given the sector high national and international prestige.



Miguel Angel CABRA DE LUNA (ES)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

Global Social Economy Forum - Montreal, 7-9 September 2016

The City of Montreal, together with the *Chantier de l'économie sociale*, this year hosted the **third Global Social Economy Forum-GSEF2016**, which took place from 7 to 9 September 2016. The EESC – represented by Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna as a Group III member representing the Spanish Social Economy Employers' Federation (CEPES) and in his capacity as EESC representative to the UN Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy – was part of the Honorary Committee of this major international conference.

This Honorary Committee was made up of representatives of local governments from all continents, together with key stakeholders from the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in their respective territories, as well as the major networks, institutions, companies and international organisations focusing on the SSE and the development of cities around the world.

The conference brought together around 1 500 participants from 62 countries under the motto "Collaboration between local governments and the social and solidarity economy actors for the development of cities". As well as the strong level of participation and the international mobilisation this forum sparked, it is necessary to highlight the SSE initiatives presented, which provide innovative solutions to the challenges faced across the world by public administrations in cities and communities and which boost job creation, guarantee better quality of life, facilitate social cohesion and contribute to the smart and sustainable development of cities.

Over the three days **more than thirty workshops and meetings were held where participants had the chance to discover and share global best practices** relating to the development of public policies and the SSE in urban areas, to **identify opportunities and challenges linked to cooperation** between **local governments** and **SSE stakeholders**, and to **promote international partnerships** for the development of the SSE in different territories.

Overview of our Members'

At its plenary session on 21-22 September 2016 the European or Co-Rapporteurs.



Victor ALISTAR (RO)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

ECO/407 - Public tax transparency

The EESC welcomes and endorses the Commission proposal, which aims to make the taxation system more transparent and will thus boost public confidence. Tax transparency ensures recognition of the contribution made by multinational enterprises to public revenue in the place in which they operate. A level playing field is guaranteed when all operators active in the single market have a fair tax burden on profits made in the European single market, regardless of the way in which they are organised in the global market.

The EESC considers that the set of data to be provided must be that established by the BEPS standards which the EU and most Member States have already adopted. Also, the regulatory instruments set out in the Commission's anti-tax-avoidance package must ensure that large and/or multinational enterprises which meet their tax commitments honestly are not put at a disadvantage by the aggressive tax planning of other multinational enterprises.



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The EESC recommends the data be disclosed in one of the internationally-used languages included among the official languages of the EU and that Member States be required by legislation to establish a public register for country-by-country reporting, to include an EU-wide standardised system. The publication of the data on a portal should take the form of an open system, enabling civil society and business to access and use the data easily.

In the view of the EESC, the Commission must produce a more ambitious package which pursues the ongoing tax harmonisation, avoiding both tax base erosion and the dangers of abuse and surcharging in some jurisdictions. The EESC considers the EUR 750 million threshold to be too high and calls either for it to be reduced or for a schedule to be drawn up stipulating a gradual decrease in the threshold. Finally, clearer criteria must be established for defining tax good governance and listing tax jurisdictions which do not comply.

Work in the EESC

Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs



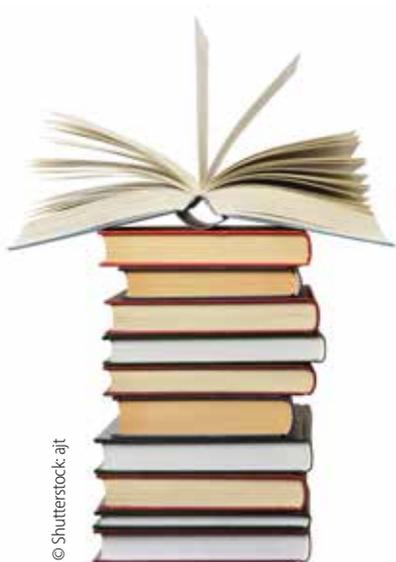
Christian MOOS (DE)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

SC/045 - Future proof legislation

The EESC notes that efforts have been made to improve the quality of European legislation and that these efforts must be stepped up. **High quality, simple, comprehensible and consistent legislation "is an essential factor in integration, not a burden or cost to be reduced"**.

The "innovation principle" is also in line with the thinking behind the REFIT programme. The EESC recalls the tenets of the "Better regulation" programme, which have already been defined and applied, and stresses that this new principle must not take precedence over them; it must be applied intelligently and carefully, particularly with regard to social protection and the environment, health and consumer protection. European legislation should always aim to create a legal framework that enables businesses and citizens to benefit from the advantages of the internal market and to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens. **European legislation is future proof if it is proactive and forward-looking.**

The EESC believes that **regulatory costs should be proportional to the benefits they generate**. It is not only the content of legislation but the legislative process itself that must be future proof, so as to meet the needs of businesses and citizens. Each piece of "future proof legislation" must remain true to its original objective and be able to be enacted flexibly. It should not go into too much detail, instead limiting itself to providing a framework. The EESC is in favour of clarifying the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality which are sometimes used as arguments by opponents of legislative initiatives, without sufficient substantiation of their underlying reasoning. **Civil society should serve as a sounding board for "future proof legislation"**. The EESC is well placed to act as intermediary between the legislator and civil society organisations and the social partners. The EESC considers that impact assessments of legislative measures must be taken into account in the legislative process but cannot replace the political process.



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Graham WATSON (UK)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

TEN/588 - Security of natural gas supply

The EESC recognises the progress made in improving the security of gas supply over the last few years but stresses the need for undertaking further efforts to achieve a coherent EU gas supply policy that provides European with the supply security they expect. Gas policy is evolving in an international context shaped by COP21's ambitious climate change targets and geopolitical tensions, in particular those in the direct neighbourhood to Europe. Gas is seen as an important transitional source of energy towards a low-carbon economy. The EESC recognises the importance of primarily private investments into gas supply infrastructure and that a predictable and reliable policy framework can facilitate such investments. The Committee highlights that pursuing the reduction of demand for gas, in particular through improving the energy efficiency of gas-heated building, is a crucial policy area for gas security. The EESC also remarks that the combination of rolling-out of renewables with an accelerated electrification may further reduce the demand for gas. This likely reduction in gas demand in line with Europe's ambitious climate policy goals also needs to be taken into account in the Commission's gas consumption forecasts.



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Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 21-22 September 2016 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.



Lutz RIBBE (DE)

Member of the Various Interests' Group

NAT/681 - EU biodiversity policy

The EESC draws particular attention to the Commission's comments on the importance of protecting biodiversity, which it compares to climate protection. This is not just about conserving animal and plant species: it concerns the very conditions of human existence. The EESC calls for immediate implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives. The same goes for the Water Framework Directive, whose consistent and immediate implementation would in the EESC's view make a considerable contribution to improving biodiversity protection.

The Member States must finally determine actual financial needs arising from the implementation of EU law, and the Commission must make the necessary funding available. The financing of biodiversity through the second CAP pillar can be considered to have failed, and the EESC therefore calls for a separate budget heading to be introduced under which financing for the Natura 2000 network must be made available.

The strengthening of Green Infrastructure is explicitly welcomed.

The inconsistencies in EU policies have been criticised by Commission departments, the Environment Council, the European Parliament, the CoR and the EESC, and there has been no substantial change in this respect in recent years.

In hindsight, the EU's various biodiversity strategies and biodiversity programmes from 1998, 2001, 2006 and 2010, each of which accurately described the problems and set out appropriate tools, must therefore be regarded as largely futile.

The EESC therefore observes once again – as in a large number of its previous opinions on EU biodiversity – that **it is political will that is lacking, not legal foundations.**



Antonio LONGO (IT)

Member of the Various Interests' Group

TEN/592 - European Cloud Initiative

The EESC supports and endorses the Commission's strategic choice of an open European computing cloud geared to the scientific community, as part of a strong political and economic commitment to digital innovation. The EESC proposes a European cloud open to

all citizens and businesses, and calls for greater clarity on how the European Data Infrastructure, which is also intended to promote development and the implementation of High Performance Computing (HPC), will interact with the flagship initiative to boost quantum technologies. Therefore, the Commission should launch wide-ranging consultations, directly involving the scientific community and associations representing people's interests, on the decisive question of governance as well as on the progressive opening up to all and arrangements for data use and preservation. In order to offer businesses and the public a clear and secure legislative framework in such a strategic but also complex and fast-changing sector as the digital one, the EESC proposes that a "single digital Europe portal" be set up, so citizens and businesses have ready access to relevant EU texts. If a fully-fledged digital revolution is to take place, there is a need for education and training for every age group of the European population, whether working or not. The EESC highlights the need to invest in the technological training of women and in enabling them to access senior and management posts in particular.



Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL)

Vice President and Member of the Various Interests' Group

NAT/693 - Sustainable Development: A Mapping of the EU's internal and external policies

The UN 2030 Agenda should be turned into a proactive, transformational and positive narrative for Europe. This forward-looking narrative would also help overcome the unprecedented lack of trust of EU citizens in the EU project and in particular win young people's support for it. The EU should use the UN 2030 Agenda in this way to present EU citizens with a new vision for Europe: **the social contract of the 21st century.**

The Committee calls for an overarching and integrated strategy for a Sustainable Europe 2030 and beyond, providing the necessary long-term time horizon, policy coordination and coherence for implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda. This strategy must include specific targets for SDG implementation, review and monitoring mechanisms, as well as action plans with the necessary legislative and policy instruments, awareness-raising activities and a plan for mobilising financial resources. The design phase of the strategy should provide for broad consultation of civil society, governments, parliaments and local authorities.

The EESC has identified the following key policy areas for transformational change towards sustainable development and recommends that the Commission establish appropriate flagship initiatives:

- a just transition to a low-carbon, circular and collaborative economy;
- transition towards a socially inclusive society and economy – decent work and human rights;

- transition to sustainable food production and consumption;
- investing in innovation and long-term infrastructure modernisation and encouraging sustainable businesses;
- making trade work for global sustainable development.



Cristian PIRVULESCU (RO)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

SOC/544 - Entry/Exit system

The EESC considers that:

- the entry/exit system (EES) in its new form is indeed needed, providing added value in terms of security at European level. As in other areas of policy and regulation, with its opinions the Committee promotes a balanced approach which reconciles security and proper law enforcement without ever departing from the fundamental values of the EU;
- the roll-out of the new EES must be accompanied by campaigns explaining as clearly as possible how the system works, emphasising the protection of personal data. It recommends organising information campaigns and educational campaigns targeting both authorities and third-country nationals;
- staff involved in running the system must be properly informed and trained, and recommends that such training be given significant financial and institutional support;
- compliance with fundamental rights will need to be monitored constantly by the competent EU institutions and open to civil society organisations at both European and national levels.

After the EES is rolled out, the Committee would recommend carrying out an investigation similar to the one undertaken in the pilot phase, in order to explore the system's impact on passengers under "real-life" conditions.

It is important to clarify to what extent the Member States must contribute on a budgetary and institutional level to implementing this system. It is necessary to clarify this issue and to find solutions to obtain a firm commitment from Member States to cooperate and contribute to implementing the system.



Etele BARÁTH (HU)
Member of the Various Interests' Group
President of the 2020 steering committee

ECO/400 - New measures for development-oriented governance and implementation

In its opinion the EESC argues for a simple, accessible strategy and objectives and a single, long-term project for Europe (EU 2030-50 strategy). The EESC believes that the main instrument for stronger central, development-oriented governance should be the European Semester. If the essentially economic, GDP-based performance indicator were to be flanked by an additional, results-based indicator that reflects sustainability and includes primarily social and environmental factors, it could serve as a basis for monitoring the effectiveness of development-oriented governance.

The EESC considers that close coordination and the introduction of an open cooperation method between the Member States are necessary. The legal and financial instruments (in particular the European Structural and Investment Funds as well as the European Fund for Strategic Investment) must be consolidated. Shared, multilevel implementation is necessary. The EESC believes, that One of the key elements in long-term development-oriented governance is continuity.

The EESC has always argued in favour of stronger democratic participation. It is vital to keep the public properly involved. Regarding the involvement of the economic and social partners and NGOs, it should be ensured at all levels. The EESC supports the establishment of a European Code of Conduct on Partnership), with the aim of providing Member States with a partnership framework for planning and implementation.

ADOPTED

The complete texts of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's website:



<http://dm.eesc.europa.eu/EESCDocumentSearch/Pages/opinionssearch.aspx>



NEWS from Group III

Welcome, Dominika!



In the middle of September 2016 we were pleased to welcome our new Slovak trainee, **Dominika Bucova** who comes from a small city in the middle of Slovakia, called Martin. She did her Bachelor's degree in International Relations in Slovakia, and she also took part in the Erasmus exchange programme and was therefore able to spend 4 study months abroad in Tallinn, Estonia at Tallinn Technical University. More recently, after successfully completing of her Bachelor's degree, she moved to Castellon de la Plana, Spain where she began an International Masters in Peace, Conflict and Development studies, taught in English, at Universidad Jaume I. On account of her studies and multicultural background she is naturally interested in international affairs, the third sector, conflict transformation, the protection of human rights, environmental issues and sustainable development. We are happy to welcome her, and wish her lot of luck and success during her trainee period!

Brigitte back as PA



Sander Kashiva has left Group III Secretariat and has been replaced by **Brigitte Carmosin** as Personal Assistant to President Luca JAHIER.

OUR GROUP'S STRENGTH



The **Consumers and Environment Category** will hold its 3rd meeting of the year on Thursday 1 December 2016 (all day event).



The next **SMEs, Professions and Crafts Category** meeting is scheduled to take place on Friday 2 December 2016 at 09.00.

The European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs **Pierre Moscovici** confirmed his attendance, from 09.30 to 10.30, to debate on the Implication of fiscal policy options on monetary policy transfer, credit expansion and their impact on SMEs and regional cross border development. Category members will also debate on the ongoing works on the opinion INT/787 Efficiency of SMEs Policies as well as on E-commerce and geo-blocking issues for SMEs.

In the afternoon the Category will discuss two main themes linked to the interests of the liberal professions, namely, social security systems for liberal professions and the representative structure of liberal professions in Europe.



Pierre Moscovici,
European Commissioner



The **Social Economy Category** will hold its 3rd meeting of the year on 28 November 2016. The meetings in 2017 are scheduled for 4 April, 8 June and 10 November.

Photo of the last meeting of the Social Economy Category on 29 July 2016 with (left to right) **Mr Krzysztof Michałkiewicz**, Secretary of State, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Poland, Group III members and spokespersons of the category **Krzysztof BALON** and **Alain COHEUR**.



SOCIAL ECONOMY: CORNERSTONE OF GROUP III



Giuseppe Guerini (IT)
Member of the Various Interests' Group

Giuseppe Guerini, recently elected President of CECOP (European confederation of industrial and service cooperatives), has done a lot of work as an EESC member on the Social Economy.

It is more and more evident that we need a “new welfare system” for our Europe, which meets essential social protection and care needs. A welfare system that must be reinvented and that requires extraordinary capacity for transformation and innovation. We have a duty to strive for this, with more strength and determination than we have shown in recent years.

Indeed it appears that current welfare systems have not managed to address the changing forms of social exclusion: the various dimensions of poverty, dependence and disability, sickness and inequalities in access to services and knowledge.

If we examine the impact that traditional welfare systems have had in European countries in recent years on reducing inequality in the distribution of wealth, we can see that they have failed in their mission.

We have continued to improve procedures, classify services, professionalise relations and to structure standards, but we are having difficulty determining needs and have settled for organising good procedures. This produces an enormous amount of red tape relating to monitoring

procedures (particularly entry procedures), which lead to the conclusion that a service works well and is meeting its objectives if all procedures are carried out correctly and if there is a limited number of non-compliances. However, we risk losing sight of the end results.

This is why it is so urgent to find ways to promote subsidiarity, along with personal skills and abilities, in order to generate a new welfare system that leaves new scope for freedom of initiative. This initiative may be the best way for social economy enterprises to be heard, as social cooperatives in Italy have shown for years.

A little more must be invested in “institutional trust” and in promoting experiences that are potentially generative. However this needs a huge cultural effort and requires all of us to improve our willingness to change.

I therefore believe that welfare services should to all intents and purposes be considered as local development policies. As social inclusion projects, run by linking up various resources in the area, they have generated potential for economic initiatives that have extended into different sectors of the local economy from agriculture to tourism, and from energy to the environment.



NEWS from Group III

Group III Extraordinary Meeting in Bratislava: the role of civil society in the European Energy Union



The role of the civil society in the European Energy Union

Ensuring secure, sustainable, competitive and affordable energy

27 October 2016 | 10 a.m.

Falkensteiner Hotel Bratislava | Pilsárkova 7372/5 | 811 03 Bratislava | Slovakia


European Economic and Social Committee
Group III – Various Interests

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is organising a conference in **Bratislava** on **27th October 2016**. The conference will take place **10:00 – 17:00** and will feature interventions by:

- **Maroš Šefčovič**, Commission Vice-President for Energy Union
- **Luca Jahier**, President of the Various Interests' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
- **Vojtech Ferencz**, State Secretary of the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic

The aim of the conference is to obtain a better grasp of the role civil society has to play in energy security and the transition to renewable energy at both national and regional levels. The challenge is to channel civil society involvement and expertise towards creating more links, partnerships and dialogue between local, national and regional players.

Mr Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President in charge of Energy Union of the European Commission will open the conference to introduce the European Commission's point of view regarding the role of the Civil Society in the European Energy Union.

More specifically, the conference will explore the following themes:

- Energy security and efficient supply
- Effective management of the transition to renewable energies
- An Energy Union with a forward-looking climate change policy
- Ways that energy policy can lead to national and regional development
- The new electricity market's design and impact on vulnerable consumers



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