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EESC priorities during the **Latvian Presidency**



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European Economic and Social Committee

Note from the President

At a time when the European Parliament has just started a new term and the European Commission has a new team in place, the European Economic and Social Committee is continuing to move forwards as a committed partner of the Latvian Presidency. As the representative of European civil society, our committee has recently seen confirmation of **its key role in building a more democratic European Union** in the European Parliament report that has recognised its work as being critical to the success of the European citizens' initiative. And this is the path on which we wish to continue.





Our committee stands shoulder to shoulder with the Latvian Presidency to help Europe meet the challenges ahead on behalf of its citizens. These challenges include:

- **growth – the source of job creation:** industrial policy and energy policy must lie at the heart of EU action for the coming five years if we want not only to ensure that job creation takes root in our regions, but also to take control of our destiny, in the light of recent events;
- **the digital era:** in terms of current and future opportunities for growth, and also of its impact on other sectors, Europe must remain in the vanguard and ensure it does not leave any of its regions behind;
- **globalisation:** if it aspires to be a global player, Europe must be involved in the major meetings that will take place, in order to make its voice heard and defend its economic interests within the draft transatlantic treaty, boosting a genuine African policy (which has become weakened over time) and strengthening its partnership with the Mediterranean countries – immigration in the Mediterranean and the daily tragedies taking place there urgently require a collective and comprehensive response by the European Union. At the same time, Europe is currently paying the price for its lack of a common immigration policy and a truly common asylum system;

- **climate change:** Europe should be at the forefront of the major meetings and, in particular, play a leading role in the preparations for COP21 in Paris in 2015.

To achieve these goals, the EU must move forward with all Europeans, as part of a stronger democratic process that enables European action to meet people's expectations on the ground. This is the purpose of our committee and its commitment. In recent months, we have gone even further, by reviewing our working procedures and introducing new mechanisms, such as studies carried out by our observatories to measure the real impact of directives, all with a view to strengthening the voice of European civil society.

The next six months, which will be steered by the Latvian Presidency, are extremely important as they offer an opportunity to demonstrate that Europe has gained a new momentum, which will bring it closer to the people of Europe.

*Henri Malosse
EESC President*

The EESC – a committed partner of Latvian civil society

The European Economic and Social Committee started to develop special relations with Latvian civil society well before the country's accession to the European Union in 2004. It was thus actively involved in preparing Latvia throughout its accession process, particularly through extensive and ongoing dialogue with the country's economic and social representatives.

In November 2014, EESC President Henri Malosse held in-depth discussions in Riga with the Latvian President Andris Bērziņš, on preparations for Latvia's presidency and on the opinions that Latvia would be asking the Committee to draw up in line with the presidency's priorities. At his many political meetings, in particular with the Latvian Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma and the Speaker of the Latvian Parliament Ināra Mūrniece,

emphasis was also placed on the importance of dialogue with civil society and the increasing need for participatory democracy in Europe. President Malosse noted furthermore that all Latvian civil society organisations – trade unions, employers' organisations, NGOs, etc. supported the EESC, in order both to have a greater voice in Brussels, and to be kept better informed about EU developments.

More directly, links have also been forged with local politicians such as the Mayor of Jelgava – a city of 63 000 inhabitants – who has been awarded the title of most business-friendly politician, and also with students from Riga Technical University, with whom Mr Malosse held discussions on the vital importance of matching training to labour market needs in the fields of science and the new technologies.

*From the left: Henri Malosse, EESC President,
Andris Bērziņš, President of Latvia*



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Making European civil society's voice heard by the Latvian Presidency



- *At a time when the economic crisis has undermined years of economic and social progress and poverty and social exclusion are increasing, the European Economic and Social Committee will focus on how to sustain and develop the **European social model**, with a stronger emphasis on **social investments** as a productive factor. The **human aspect** must be at the heart of all innovation, with the goal of striking the right balance between economic, social and environmental concerns.*
- *To put the EU back on the path to growth, the Committee will also contribute actively to the roll-out of President Juncker's Agenda for **Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change** with particular emphasis on the priorities related to implementing the ambitious investment package as well as **deepening and completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union**.*



- The EESC will continue its work on the urban areas to create a **common European urban development practice** which contributes to the stimulation of economic growth in a sustainable manner. At the same time, it will be actively involved in promoting existing and future **macroregional strategies**, such as EUSAIR (Adriatic and Ionian) and EUSALP (Alpine region).
- **Consumer issues** will also be very high on the Committee's agenda, with special attention paid to new forms of consumption such as collaborative consumption and the sharing economy. Building on previous work on **planned obsolescence**, the Committee will launch a study on how better information about the expected life of products could influence consumer behaviour, allowing manufacturers to adapt their production to consumers' requests. The annual European Consumer Day will take place as usual during this semester.
- The Committee will also continue its priority work on **transport policy** and **civil aviation**, in particular airport capacity and integrated skies. In relation to **energy** issues, the Committee will be promoting a **European Energy Dialogue (EED)** and organising a macro-regional conference involving several neighbouring Member States. In the **digital agenda** domain, special attention will be paid to **big data and user protection**, as well as the **greening of IT growth**.
- On **climate change**, the important links with agriculture and forestry will be examined in an exploratory opinion requested by the Latvian Presidency, and the Committee's position for the **COP21 in Paris** will be defined, bringing on board civil society from outside the EU. Work on the **Post-2015 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals** will continue, and the EESC will also play an active role **in the Milan 2015 Expo on Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life**.
- During the next semester the EESC will maintain its focus on **neighbourhood policy**, with migration, youth employment and a more integrated civil society in southern countries remaining a priority in the **Euromed's** activities. The Committee will also deliver an opinion on the **EU-Central Asia Strategy** at the request of the Latvian Presidency, and will continue its priority work on the **post-2015 Development Goals** and the follow-up to the **EU trade negotiations** including the **TTIP negotiations** and in particular the topical discussion on **Investor to State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)**.

A matter of collective responsibility during the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

On 1 January 2015 Latvia assumes the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time in its history. Our country is honoured to take up this task of moderating the work done by Member States and coordinating it with other EU institutions to reach the best possible agreements. The challenges that the European Union currently is facing are complex: people are worried about jobs and growth and we are facing a difficult geopolitical situation with additional pressure on EU action. We will use our Presidency to try to address the internal and external concerns, to help strengthen economic recovery and growth.

Latvia has defined three Presidency priorities: “competitive Europe” to promote growth and jobs, “digital Europe” to seize the opportunities provided by information and communication technologies and “engaged Europe” to tackle global issues.

The Latvian Presidency will seek to work in close cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee not only on matters concerning a competitive and digital Europe. It also considers it essential to collaborate on the issues of engaging civil society in the decision-making processes, on bridging gaps, and on bringing the EU institutions closer to EU citizens. In order to do so, we plan to revitalise the Europe 2020 Strategy. We want to engage with citizens also outside the EU, making people-to-people contacts a centrepiece of our cooperation with the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia countries.

In order to improve the competitiveness of the European Union, it is essential to facilitate investment and to strengthen the Single Market. A competitive Europe can be achieved through targeted investment and continued economic policy reform. We must also create an inclusive and sustainable labour market, so that economic growth is resulting in more jobs and higher wages. Our Presidency's focus is therefore on jobs and economic growth, whilst working on reducing energy dependency, on moving towards a stable climate policy, and on taking clear action to boost industrial competitiveness.



The Digital Europe priority is another avenue to the creation of new jobs and growth in the European Union. The first step is to develop trust between service providers and consumers and the removal of barriers to cross-border trade and services. The Presidency will work on the data protection package and on unlocking the digital opportunities offered by the existing infrastructure in the EU. It is equally important to boost digital skills, providing as many people as possible with access to modern information and communication technologies. The Latvian Presidency will encourage dialogue on e-government for more inclusiveness and transparency in public administrations.

We live in a time when prosperity and growth cannot be taken for granted. The EU needs to dare to change and to transform itself, always involving citizens. We will work hand in hand with the European Economic and Social Committee in delivering a better Europe to our people.

Laimdota Straujuma
Prime Minister of the Republic of Latvia



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Some basic facts about Latvia



Source: Latvian Ministry of Regional Development



Official name	The Republic of Latvia
Capital	Rīga
Surface area¹	64 480 km ²
Other major cities	Daugavpils, Liepāja, Jelgava, Ventspils
Official languages	Latvian
Currency	Euro
Population (July 2014 est.)²	2 165 165
GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (EU-28 = 100) (July 2014)³	67
GDP at market prices in millions of euro, 2013⁴	23 000
Unemployment rate in July 2014⁵	Total: 10.8%
Unemployment rate for 15-24 age group⁶ (3rd quarter of 2013)	23.9%
Religions	Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Other
Life expectancy estimated in 2014⁷	Total population: 73.44 years Men: 68.41 years Women: 78.75 years
Main exports in 2012⁸	1) Wood and articles derived from wood (15%) 2) Base metals and articles of base metal (14%) 3) Machinery and mechanical appliances; electrical equipment (14%)
Main imports in 2012⁹	1) Machinery and mechanical appliances; electrical equipment (18%) 2) Mineral products (18%) 3) Other goods (12%)

1 Index Mundi, Latvia, Surface area, 2011, <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/latvia/surface-area>.

2 Index Mundi, Latvia Demographics Profile 2014, http://www.indexmundi.com/latvia/demographics_profile.html.

3 European Commission, EUROSTAT, data from 1 June 2014, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tec00114>.

4 GDP at current market prices, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/File:GDP_at_current_market_prices_2002-03_and_2011-13_YB14-fr.png.

5 Unemployment statistics, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics.

6 European Commission, EUROSTAT, Youth unemployment, 2013Q4, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/File:Youth_unemployment_2013Q4_\(%25\).png](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/File:Youth_unemployment_2013Q4_(%25).png).

7 Index Mundi, Latvia Demographics Profile 2014, http://www.indexmundi.com/latvia/demographics_profile.html.

8 LIAA, Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, 2012 Foreign Trade Statistics, <http://www.liaa.gov.lv/trade/foreign-trade-statistics>.

9 LIAA, Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, 2012 Foreign Trade Statistics, <http://www.liaa.gov.lv/trade/foreign-trade-statistics>.



European Economic and Social Committee

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